

The Editors WHAT THE 'RESCUE' REVEALS

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Gregory Baum on the puzzlement of Peter L. Berger

Peter Chirico on Hans Küng

Daniel T. Rodgers on Malcolm Cowley

John Judis on Michael Harrington

Robert Leiter on William Maxwell

Don McDonagh on ballet memoirs

Correspondence

Whole new attitude

Detroit, Mich.

To the Editors: I congratulate *Commonweal* for publishing the editorial "Are Nuclear Wars 'Winnable'?" [Mar. 28], and I agree fully with the editorial's conclusions. It reinforces my conviction about the urgent necessity of a genuine conversion to a "whole new attitude toward war." When Pope Paul cried out at the United Nations, "War never again!," he was calling all Catholics and all people of good faith to this new attitude. As Catholics we've got to take that cry seriously.

(BISHOP) THOMAS J. GUMBLETON
Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit

Hitchcock & Higgins

Peoria, Ill.

To the Editor: *Commonweal* is to be congratulated on adequately showcasing its notice of James Hitchcock's important *Catholicism & Modernity* [March 14] Msgr. Higgins is to be congratulated on his tact, coherence, and moral seriousness in dealing with a text which seems to have caused him some pain. But it is still possible to say Hitchcock's book received an inadequate review.

I don't, for instance, understand how Higgins's details on the St. Stephen's-crown transaction either refute Hitchcock on the narrowest grounds of fact; or refute his general polemic point: that U.S. liberals, Catholic liberals in particular, are inconsistent in their application of general principles. Anyway, in case Higgins dislikes this particular illustration, there are many more examples, supporting this proposition in Hitchcock's book. Nor are your sophisticated readers likely to accept either Higgins's implication that Philip Rieff is only a marginal intellectual source; or the more straightforward argument in the review that Rieff's ideas about U.S. intellectuals, are not made relevant to what Hitchcock has to say about the public behavior of many Catholic clerisy. . . .

The review's professional charges against Hitchcock are that his book is both inadequately researched and over-partisan. But already these charges are confused by the separate implication that Hitchcock himself has inadequate inside knowledge of U.S. Catholicism. Really? Does Higgins believe this?

The review makes the assumption one can't attack contemporary Catholic liberal misbehavior unless one also spends fifty percent of his words on Catholic conservative misbehavior. Aside from the social fact that in the seventies the Left is formally, *verbally* schismatic, while the Right still claims at least to be defending "Christianity," Higgins is here only reviving the crude logical fallacy, for example, about pro-life: that it has no credentials with our intellectual establishment unless its members each certify their liberal respectability on Panama, the B-1, and gun control. Finally, Higgins's more trusting readers will never learn the author of *Catholicism & Modernity* paid his liberal dues back when the Catholic Far Right actually had some political muscle.

Higgins's words on Rieff unfortunately substitute for a lucid account of the book's main sociological thesis: that one large section of U.S. Catholic clerical middle-management has developed its own incestuous bureaucratic momentum. They no longer function either as missionaries for intellectual Catholic Christianity or as adequate public symbolic representatives for the institutional church. They are instead effectively at war with the American laity—often financed by anti-Catholic law firms, foundations, etc., which also supply job-boltholes after their cover as "Catholic" priests and nuns gets blown; better still, before. . . .

In other words, *Catholicism & Modernity* simply applies the standard New-Class theory—standard except to Higgins?—to the U.S. clergy. Msgr. Higgins's reaction is that Hitchcock doesn't prove his case. I think, first, Higgins confuses "proof" with valid evidence. Second, Msgr. Higgins surely underestimates the difficulty of getting "proof" about motives when one is in the establishment and has buddies to

cover for him. Surely the evidence in *The Brethren*, about Justice Brennan's backstage maneuvers in the abortion decisions, was already available to his old friend, Msgr. Higgins, when Higgins's defensive columns about Brennan were being so recently syndicated in the parish press?

What else is Hitchcock to do but cite the available data (or posthumous memoirs) and suggest likely explanations from Rieff and Peter Berger? Or quote Paul Goodman to the effect that the U.S. clergy were foisting their own identity crisis on lay students undergoing a religious revival?

JAMES MARK PURCELL

The author replies:

To the Editors: A friend of mine (not a member of the "incestuous" Catholic bureaucracy, by the way) has accurately characterized Mr. Purcell's letter as a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose proposition and, accordingly, has advised me not to waste too much time trying to rebut it. His point is well taken—but, anyhow, here goes.

Professor Hitchcock, in *Catholicism & Modernity*, explicitly charges that a staff member of the United States Catholic Conference (Fr. Bryan Hehir) was guilty of following a double standard because, having opposed an American treaty with Franco Spain, he later supported the return of the Crown of Saint Stephen to Hungary. According to Hitchcock, this reflected "a habit, widespread in religious circles . . . of protesting injustice only in Western nations,

(Continued on page 284)

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mi. 48106. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Copyright © 1980 Commonweal Publishing Co.

Illustrations: Page 260: Bas., *Tachydromos*, Greece; p. 263, courtesy of Basic Books; cover and p. 270, courtesy of Random House.

Contents

Volume CVII, Number 9

Correspondence	258
Editorials	259
The good soldier system: <i>Thomas Powers</i>	261
Peter Berger's unfinished symphony: <i>Gregory Baum</i>	263
An interview with Mary Gordon: <i>Diana Cooper-Clark</i>	270
Dance: <i>Don McDonagh</i>	274
Screen: <i>Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr.</i>	275

Books

Hans Küng: His Work and His Way/The Church—Maintained in Truth: <i>Peter Chirico</i>	277
Decade of Decision: <i>John Judis</i>	280
The Dream of the Golden Mountains: <i>Daniel T. Rodgers</i>	281
So Long, See You Tomorrow: <i>Robert A. Leiter</i>	283

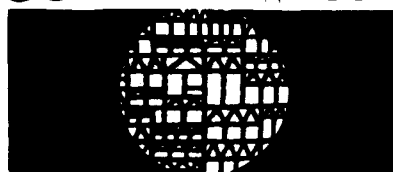
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Commonweal, A Review of Public Affairs, Literature and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas-New Year's and July and August, by Commonweal Publishing Co., 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016. Telephone: (212) MU 3-2042. Yearly subscriptions, U.S. and Canada, \$20; foreign, \$22. Special two-year rate: \$35; foreign, \$39. Single copy, \$1.

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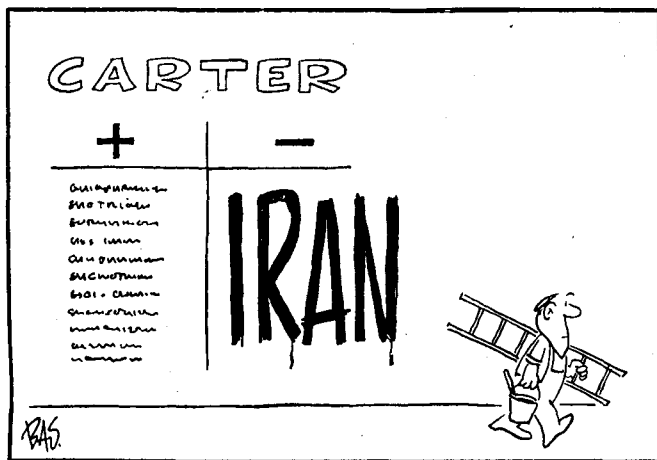
WHAT THE 'RESCUE' REVEALS

YES, WE ARE speaking with hindsight when we express dismay at the ill-fated attempt to rescue the hostages. Had we been asked beforehand, we would have strongly urged that such a dangerous plan be set aside, and we would like to hope that in the inevitable euphoria following a successful operation we would have stuck to our position. In any case, what is hindsight for, if not to learn something of value for the future? And the Iranian rescue operation illustrates two crucial facts about the present situation of America. The first is the apparent inability of the government to recognize the implications of a given policy, to stick with a policy consistently, and to offer some leadership to the nation in explaining and defending that policy. The administration played with the moral equivalent of war with no great consistency or seriousness; now it appears to be playing with war itself in the same manner. The second fact is the complete loss of perspective, bordering on hysteria, that is overtaking the nation with regard to Iran.

From the moment the hostages were seized, Washington was faced with a choice. Two separate issues were raised. One was the affront to American dignity, the violation of important diplomatic immunities, and the possible precedent for similar actions elsewhere. The other was the well-being and survival of the fifty individual lives that were at stake. Our government made the latter its primary concern. No doubt this decision was based on an optimism arising from the success of negotiations in a number of similar instances (the latest success in Colombia only a week or so ago), an optimism that proved mistaken in the Iranian case. But the government's decision, we believe, was the right one. It was in its way an affirmation of the very principle that the hostage-takers, and all-too-much international politics generally, were violating: that individual lives count, that innocent bystanders cannot be used casually in the deadly games of nations.

Once the United States had made this choice, its implications should have been acknowledged and publicly defended. Clear speaking was especially necessary after the Afghanistan invasion intervened—a far more serious development, in our eyes, for the future of global peace but one that was merged and even submerged in the public mind with the question of the hostages. As we wrote last February, the public “doesn't realize that American ‘weakness’ vis à vis Teheran is largely of our own choosing. We *want* to keep the hostages alive. We do *not* want to create further chaos in a nation bordering on the U.S.S.R. It is our own set of policy priorities that stays our hand toward Iran.” If the concern with individual lives was to predominate, that meant minimizing the element of confrontation between nations, that meant refusing to be drawn into dramatics, that meant admitting the process might be terribly long, too long in fact to suspend all normal political life in the meantime. Negotiations had to continue quietly—which would not rule out the graduated use of sanctions—but public displays had to be rejected and the press's demand for

9 May 1980: 259



constant progress reports had to be patiently explained as counter-productive.

What happened, of course, was quite different. Press, president, and Iranian militants have been engaged in a process which fed upon itself. The affair was escalated into an international test of wills in large measure because that is what the administration allowed it to become. The political returns for President Carter were obvious—at first. Far better to be the nation's leader face-to-face with Khomeini than to be debating inflation with Kennedy, Reagan, and Anderson. But that role soon produced its own kind of desperation, as revealed by the premature announcements on the morning of the Wisconsin primary. The president let public opinion drift toward the catharsis of military action. He decided to ride the tiger.

Had the rescue operation succeeded, of course, the political payoff would have been overwhelming. But Carter may yet end up smiling, thanks to the natural reflex to rally 'round the leader. Still, it would be well to keep in mind that even the abortive end to the mission was by no means the worst of outcomes. This week's newsmagazines could well be filled with photos reminiscent not of Entebbe but of the Jonestown carnage. And then what would have been the appropriate—the "necessary"—response? A punitive air strike on Iran? America would emerge with neither hostages nor honor nor the trust of other nations. In this case, as in so many others, an administration with initially sound instincts but without the courage of its convictions, or maybe without genuine convictions at all, is giving America the worst of all worlds.

Washington is going with the mood of the country, in any case, neither guiding it nor resisting it. And that mood has obscured all perspective. Fifty citizens have had their lives unjustly and tragically interrupted, though the latest Iranian moves indicate that the greatest danger the hostages have run might well have been from their rescuers. The hostages deserve the most diligent efforts on their behalf. They do not deserve—indeed it will not do them any good—an escalation of their cause to the point that it blocks out everything else occurring in a world where fifty Afghans are dying in single clashes, where forty El Salvadorans died at Archbishop Romero's funeral and a thousand more have fallen victim to violence in recent months, where thousands of Cubans risk death

to emigrate, and where the toll of suffering and death continues unabated in so many lands. Negotiations in the Middle East hobble along lamely, the arms race moves closer to that final miscalculation, the international economy is coming loose at the seams. None of these dangers can be forestalled, nor can any of the brighter developments like those in Zimbabwe be consolidated, by the kind of showdown mentality America is displaying over Iran. International peace may sometimes require bold acts and the use of force, but bold acts and the use of force do not in themselves guarantee international peace.

So where are we? The hostages are dispersed. Jimmy Carter can no longer claim that no American soldier has died in service on foreign soil during his term. Iran has been dallying with the Soviets, and Third World awareness of Moscow's version of imperialism has been dulled. President Sadat has been further compromised in the Islamic world, and his peace policy, though eminently justified in regional terms, is all the more likely to be seen as an expression of special ties with the United States.

And last of all, Cyrus Vance has resigned. His resignation is a principled and understandable move; and yet it, too, carries implications that should be weighed seriously. Imagine the response in America to the withdrawal from power of some Soviet diplomat closely identified with the policy of negotiation and compromise.

For the moment there is a pall over all of American foreign policy. A good many voices have been raised to congratulate the president for a courageous decision. For those who have always rejected the humanitarian dimension of Washington's attitude toward the affair of hostages, this praise is at least consistent. What guides them is pure *realpolitik* and the old maxim about a whiff of grapeshot. In the case of others, this praise seems like a brave front. Courage is not the only virtue and not necessarily the highest in international politics. It is certainly no substitute for wisdom, consistency, and leadership.



Of several minds: *Thomas Powers*

THE GOOD SOLDIER SYSTEM

WHEN THE CIA PLAYS BOOK REVIEWER

AT THE END of April, 1975, a Marine helicopter took off from the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon with all that remained of an American presence in Vietnam which had once included more than half a million U.S. soldiers. It was an ugly end to an ugly war. Left behind in the embassy compound, as the helicopter disappeared in the distance towards the sea, was a long, patient line of Vietnamese, standing in the gathering dark with their bags and parcels. They had been promised escape, but no more helicopters returned. The U.S. flag had been lowered and folded and carried away by the American ambassador, the doors of the embassy had been locked, files were still smoldering in the incinerators, the war was over.

After fifteen years of fighting, the end had come suddenly. In a period of only fifty-five days the South Vietnamese army first abandoned the Central Highlands and then disintegrated. On paper, at least, it had seemed a match for its North Vietnamese enemies. Huge stockpiles of war matériel—tanks, artillery, aircraft, fuel, ammunition—were captured intact by the victors. Even a week or two before the end, the U.S. Ambassador, Graham Martin, insisted something might still be salvaged, a new line of defense established, the war continued. Because he did not want to panic the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu, he refused to allow his staff to begin planning for a final evacuation. The result was chaos when reality could no longer be denied. As many as 130,000 Vietnamese were evacuated in the final days, but in the confusion many were left behind.

The United States had often predicted a bloodbath in the event of defeat. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese were afraid of the same thing; a huge milling

crowd surrounded the embassy in the last days, begging to be taken. But it was too late for an orderly flight when Martin finally conceded there was nothing further to be done. Among those left were thousands of Vietnamese—code clerks and computer operators, Special Branch policemen, officers in the Central Intelligence Organization, translators, defectors from the National Liberation Front—who had worked closely with the CIA. It would be hard to imagine people with better reason for fearing a victory by Hanoi. But that wasn't all. A good part of the CIA's files were abandoned as well, not just the usual office memos and intelligence dossiers, but computer tapes containing the names and operational histories of thousands of Vietnamese who had worked, in one way or another, for the CIA.

One of the last Americans to leave Saigon, just before the city fell, was a CIA officer named Frank Snepp. He was sickened by the debacle. When he got back to the United States he tried to persuade the CIA's director, William Colby, to order an official investigation of the disaster. Colby was not interested in an official investigation. When Snepp was given a medal for his role he tried to refuse it. Colby had ordered that no one would be allowed to refuse a medal. In December, 1975, Snepp resigned from the Agency and decided to write a book about what he had seen.

The world of intelligence is an hermetic one. The atmosphere of secrecy and intrigue closes in like a jungle's gloom. When Snepp contacted an editor at Random House, he insisted they meet in secret and speak in a kind of code. He was obsessed with a fear the CIA would somehow find a way to kill his book, or to strip it of the detail that might explain the disaster in Saigon and make it real.

The Agency had managed to trap another CIA book in the courts—costing the publisher \$150,000 in legal fees—and to suppress 168 separate words or passages on the grounds that its principal author, Victor Marchetti, had signed a binding contract with the CIA not to reveal classified information. One passage which it tried but failed to suppress reported that Richard Helms, then the Agency's director, had once mispronounced the name of the Malagasy Republic in an official meeting. Snepp had signed a similar agreement on joining the CIA in 1968, and he was afraid it would be used to emasculate his book. The Agency, meanwhile, was leaking its own version of events in Saigon to friendly journalists. Snepp worried that his book would be tied up in legal proceedings while the CIA surreptitiously attacked and discredited him. The solution he proposed to Random House was for the secret publication of his book, *Decent Interval*.

Random House agreed and the book was sent to the printer in the summer of 1977. Only a handful of editors knew of its existence; it was not announced in the fall catalog, no galleys were sent to the usual advance reviewers, the jacket copy was typed at the last minute and printed directly from manuscript, 15,000 copies of the book were sent to 2000 bookstores with a covering letter explaining the unprecedented procedure. The world at large, and the CIA, both learned of the book's publication from front-page stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* on November 18, 1977. The Agency was furious; it claimed Snepp had broken his promise twice—the promise he made on joining, and a second promise, made to Stansfield Turner personally on May 17, 1977, that he would submit his manuscript for review. In February, 1978, the Department of Justice sued Snepp for breach of contract, asking the court for all of Snepp's earnings from the book without regard to any classified information it might contain. Damage to the nation's security was not at issue, in short, but whether or not the CIA could successfully insist on a right to censor manuscripts by its former employees.

Snepp's book is quite long, 580 pages;

9 May 1980: 261

is filled with circumstantial detail; and makes for painful reading. It goes a long way toward explaining the American failure in Vietnam, which was cursed from the beginning by a kind of elephantine wallowing as Americans argued with Americans over American programs to make good on an American commitment in the interests of American prestige. William Bundy once called it "the good doctor" theory; it didn't matter if the United States was successful, only that the world should see we made an honest effort. Snepp was there to see the honest effort come to an end, caught between officers in the field who *knew* what was happening and the embassy officials locked into a dialogue with Washington which considered things from every conceivable angle except that of the Vietnamese. The ambassador played the part of a stoic Roman, as if no one could be hurt by anything he disdained to notice. The CIA's station chief, Thomas Polgar, hoped to negotiate a coalition government at the last moment through the help of Hungarian diplomats. It did not occur to him to wonder why the North Vietnamese would surrender in bargaining what their army was about to win in the field. By chance it was Snepp who drove Thieu to the airport when he finally decided to quit the country. *Decent Interval*—the title is an ironic use of Henry Kissinger's phrase for his goal in the peace talks—captures a sense of the passionate confusions and illusions as a twenty-year policy collapsed in disarray. Many of the final tragedies might have been avoided if only the Americans had been willing to admit failure even a week or two sooner. But the tragedies were Vietnamese; they were the ones who died in the last futile battles and were left stranded on the tarmac as the Americans pulled out. As I say, Snepp's book is extremely interesting and quite painful, and the CIA has never claimed it revealed any classified information of value to an enemy.

What, then, are we to make of the Supreme Court's decision on February 19 that Snepp had violated a "constructive trust" to submit his book for review, and must surrender all his earnings? The court went out of its way to do this,

refusing to hear argument on the matter and going further than the Justice Department had asked in its appeal of a lower court decision. In effect the court ruled that one condition of employment by the CIA is a partial surrender of Constitutional rights to freedom of the press and speech. The government's purpose in suing Snepp was to reestablish the discipline which had broken down under the twin shocks of Vietnam and Watergate, prompting government officials to speak out on matters they felt too important to be tolerated with the customary silence of "the good soldier."

The Snepp case has been typical of official reaction to the great controversies of recent years. Apart from the crime of treason, which is defined in the Constitution, there have traditionally been no laws governing the flow of information in official circles. The classification system, whereby "sensitive" facts are placed on a scale from CONFIDENTIAL to TOP SECRET, COSMIC and beyond, was established by executive order, not by Congress. An official might be fired for leaking a secret, but he could not be prosecuted. This apparently fluid system has in fact been extremely strong and effective. I can think of no high official who resigned in open protest during the Vietnam years, when disagreements were at their sharpest. There was no great flood of secret information from policymaking circles even when the government was engaged in blatantly illegal acts, from the secret bombing of Cambodia to the wiretapping of civilians. Discipline obtained in the White House, in the military, in the CIA and elsewhere with only a handful of exceptions—Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Defense Department's history of decision-making in Vietnam; Victor Marchetti who attacked covert operations in *The Cult of Intelligence*; John Stockwell who revealed the CIA's secret operations in Angola; and Snepp. The exceptions embarrassed the government by revealing the reality behind bland official pronouncements, but it would be hard to argue they damaged "the national security" in any significant way. National security, after all, does not depend on the government's absolute freedom to act, nor on its prestige, nor on

an image of confident omniscience, but rather on its pursuit of realistic policies which enjoy the informed support of American citizens. Far from damaging the national security, the handful of defectors helped to clear the air and focus the debate on what had really happened, and why.

One of the strengths of the American good soldier system in these matters is that it is designed to break down under stress. No government can function where every official refuses to budge from his own position, or to accept bureaucratic defeat. But there comes a time when the disagreements are too profound to be masked in silence. Then the issue must be taken to a larger audience, so the general public—which pays the ultimate price for failure—may at least know what it's in for. Government officials do not by nature seem to be obstreperous men and women; indeed it is probably too difficult to get them to take a principled position even where it's clearly called for. If they go in silence they can expect to be invited back someday, while a noisy dissent can be counted on to pretty much end a career. This means, as a practical matter, that things have to go a long way before a controversy erupts in public. Better late than never.

The Snepp decision marks a retreat from this traditional system, in which officials are free to break with the consensus if conscience pushed them to it. The government itself, for obvious reasons, would like something still more certain, a way to impose discipline (which means silence) when the good soldier system can no longer be counted on to do the job. A number of proposals for variants of an official secrets act have been made in recent years, and the Snepp decision is clearly a step in that direction. No one has claimed Snepp did not tell the truth. The government seems to have learned nothing from the truth he told. Perhaps the most enduring result of his book is a far-reaching victory by the CIA for the right to harass and impede other defectors with the law's delay. This will not help officials to be wise, but only to mask and confuse their failures of wisdom.

THOMAS POWERS

A PROVOCATIVE & PUZZLING SCHOLAR OF RELIGION



Peter L. Berger's unfinished symphony

GREGORY BAUM

IN THE FIELD of American sociology Peter Berger stands out as an original, humanistic thinker who has devised new sociological approaches and succeeded in shedding light on society in general and on contemporary social developments in particular. In the world of social science, dominated on the whole by purely secular interests, Berger also stands out as a provocative sociologist swimming against the stream. He takes religion with utmost seriousness. Along with language and other forms of human self-expression, religion is an essential element of the process by which men construct their universe and by doing so construct themselves.

Berger is not only a social scientist; he is also a moralist. While he strongly defends the value-neutral character of the social sciences, he demands that the sociologist, after his proper sociological work is done, situate his conclusions in the conflictual world of the present and derive practical consequences from them. The sociologist as human person must be concerned about suffering humanity and apply his science, value-free though it may be, to the promotion of human well-being.

Occasionally Berger writes specifically as a Christian thinker. Although he brackets Christian presuppositions in his sociology of religion, he is often quite willing to change his hat, become a theologian, and reflect on his sociological conclusions from the viewpoint of his Christian faith. In his book, *A Rumor of Angels*, Berger presents himself as a theological thinker, but even here he keeps in strict separation the two distinct methodologies, the value-free science of the sociologist and the committed reflection of the Christian thinker. One must add that Berger is not only an original

thinker, he is also a brilliant writer: his books are a delight to read. The unlikely is true for him: he is a scholar with a sense of humor.

Berger's insistence on value neutrality, however, is not without its puzzlement. Social sciences, like the natural sciences, are value-free. This is Berger's repeated emphasis. The scientist must bracket the social world to which he belongs, he must detach himself as much as possible from his values, his aspirations, his interests; in his mind he must sever his ties to his class, his people, his nation. In his selection of data, his choice of paradigms, his perception of society and his adoption of a particular methodology the social scientist must be guided by fidelity to his science alone. Berger discredits the Habermasian view, based on a distinguished intellectual tradition, that social-science research is always guided by social interests that demand careful analysis and critique.

In his sociology of religion, Berger insists that the Christian researcher detach himself from his religious faith. Social science demands "methodological atheism," a temporary suspension of personal conviction, a bracketing of the scholar's own world. Social science, moreover, excludes all metaphysics: it is the world of formal reason alone, leaving all substantive reasoning to philosophy or other disciplines. In his book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger offers a purely phenomenological definition of the "reality" referred to in the title. Reality is what imposes itself upon wide-awake consciousness with greatest vigor, with massive, urgent, and intensive force. Reality impinges upon our consciousness so strongly that we cannot escape it, it is stronger than we are, it obliges us to recognize that we cannot think it away, even though—according to Berger's analysis—it may be false consciousness on our part that assigns objective reality to the impressions that confront the mind.

Social science also excludes moral philosophy. Berger defends the position that the social scientist as a human being is bound to engage in moral reflection, that he must examine the impact of his research on society and seek applications of his sociological science that help to relieve the suffering inflicted upon people by society, but such reflections do not belong to

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9 May 1980: 263

social science: they belong to politics or social ethics. Ideally speaking, then, despite the inevitable weakness of individual scholars, social science aspires to complete value neutrality. We call this Berger's *objective* view of sociology.

AT THE SAME TIME—and here is the puzzlement—Berger assigns science, and in particular social science, a special function in the “world-building” and “world-maintaining” process. This unusual terminology demands explanation. Berger proposes an elaborate theory according to which the human reality is socially constructed in a dialectical process that combines three distinct though interrelated moments. There is the *externalization* of people's impulses, drives, intentions, and purposes; there is the *objectification* of people's self-expressions, interrelations, and common actions in institutions, the most basic of which is language itself; and there is the *interiorization* of the social world, whereby these institutions are in turn retrojected into consciousness and become part of people's own self-understanding, a process sometimes referred to as socialization. The human reality is, therefore, socially constructed. Through joint action we create the objective social world, and by doing so we create ourselves.

But how do we create ourselves? Berger does not follow the Marxist view that we build the world, including ourselves and our own consciousness, through labor. Berger insists that we produce the world through the creation of meaning. Man is a meaning-creating animal. The material arrangements of human life have a certain arbitrary character; within limits there is nothing necessary even in man's material needs. What counts is that all forms of human self-organization be meaningful. Life must make sense.

Meaning is produced by a great variety of cultural projections. The symbols that give meaning to human life have the power to create the world and maintain it in existence. Symbols can also remove meaning from an existing world, undermine it and eventually destroy it. We come here to the uniquely Bergerian view that society, the entire social reality, is essentially unstable, precarious, ever threatened to fall apart. Society is just people acting together: and if tomorrow people decided not to carry on their joint projects the social reality would fall back into chaos. Why do people go on constructing the social world? Why do we get up in the morning and move into the same routines day after day? Berger is not a Parsonian who believes in the inherent stability of the social system. Nor does he follow Marx and Weber, who supposed that the social order is held together by a big stick, the domination of the powerful. Berger does not think that social stability is imposed by the ruling class blackmailing the dependent classes, threatening that if they do not cooperate they shall not eat. For Berger the stability of the precarious social world is very largely produced by legitimating cultural systems, by sets of symbols and ideas passed on in society that give meaning to the social process and persuade people that the present ordering of life corresponds to how things are and ought to be and hence has a certain inner necessity. The more painful life becomes, the more threatened is the precarious social world and the

greater the need for more efficacious systems of meaning that protect and maintain the given order. Since the social world remains liable to return to chaos, people seek ever more reliable norms for stabilizing order. They seek a *nomos* to protect the world from chaos.

In this context Berger defines the principal function of religion: religion links the *nomos* of society to the sacred and hence, more than any other symbol system, protects the existing society. Religion is the sacred canopy of the socially constructed world. Religion is not the only legitimating symbol system. Especially in modern times when the sway of religion has been broken and people tend to define themselves without reference to the sacred, society is in need of secular systems of world explanations.

Peter Berger here assigns a special role to the sciences, especially to the social sciences: they provide explicit theories by which the institutionalized sectors of human life are legitimated in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge. These theories are often provided by full-time legitimators. Sometimes the sciences even offer a wider theoretical picture of the universe which integrates the different provinces of meaning and even encompasses the institutional order. Berger lists philosophy and science among the major “conceptual machineries of universe-maintenance.” The function which religion exercised at one time is today often taken over by secular meaning systems, among which the sciences hold a special place. While theology has no longer any public power, theology remains paradigmatic for various secular philosophical and scientific conceptualizations of the cosmos. Here reason is used to legitimate the world order. This does not mean that the social sciences are worthless propaganda or totally biased theorizing aimed at defending the existing order despite its dehumanizing trends. Berger confidently affirms that a scientist can “attain a good deal of detachment from his or her biographical and social interests.” “The scientific universe,” he writes, “is capable of attaining a good deal of autonomy as against its social base.” Still, in this context Berger admits that “each perspective, with whatever appendages of theories or even of Weltanschauungen, will be related to the concrete social interests of the group that holds it.” Impelled by the meaning-creating drive connatural to the human species, the scholar constructs his science as a kind of subworld of rationality, which achieves “a good deal” of value-free knowledge demonstrable in the community of scholars. Despite this “good deal” of value neutrality, Berger insists that “the relationship between knowledge and its social base is a dialectical one, that is, knowledge is a social product and knowledge is a factor in social change.” We shall call this Berger's *dialectical* view of social science.

HERE, THEN IS THE puzzlement of Berger's sociology. On the one hand he insists that sociology is value-free and scorns the social theorists who regard sociology as part of the world-constructing process, and on the other he insists with equal force, in the context of his general theory, that social science fulfills a particular social function, one of legitima-

Books mentioned in this article are:

A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (New York: Irvington, 1966; paper: Anchor-Doubleday, 1969).

The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (New York: Irvington, 1966; paper: Anchor-Doubleday, 1966).

Against the World for the World: The Hartford Appeal & the Future of American Religion (New York: Crossroad Books, Seabury, 1976).

The Homeless Mind (New York: Irvington, 1973; paper: Random House-Vintage, 1973).

Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change (New York: Basic Books, 1975; paper: Anchor-Doubleday, 1976).

Other books referred to are *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Overlook Press, 1973; paper: Anchor-Doubleday, 1963) and *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1969).

Peter Berger's most recent book is *The Heretical Imperative* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1979).

tion, even though it attains "a good deal" of objectivity. Berger's *objective* view of social science makes claims that go beyond "a good deal" of detachment. He defends the view that at least ideally sociologists sever themselves from the world-constructing process: ideally they transcend personal and social interests. How is this claim related to his dialectics? Berger's theoretical understanding of social science leaves open the possibility that in certain cases the social function of scientific research is not legitimating but "debunking" the social order. In Berger's early work he made much of this "debunking" task of social science. But whether "world-maintaining" or "world-shaking" social science must be understood as exercising a particular function in society and hence of contributing in one way or another to the world-constituting process. Sociology, in this perspective, is a history-creating force.

Peter Berger never explores this ambiguity. For this reason the reader always wonders about the status of Berger's own sociological theory. Does he rightfully claim for it the status of value neutrality? Or must it be understood as part of the conceptual machinery of universe maintenance, produced with "a good deal" of detachment? What, for instance, is the status of Berger's theory of man's dialectical self-construction? Or what is the status of the position that man is meaning-creating animal? We note that both Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim, the founders of the sociology of knowledge, were very much concerned with the social foundations of their own theory: they felt that a theory of knowledge (including a sociology of knowledge) is scientifically adequate only if it sheds light on the very process by which it has been generated. Berger never wrestles with the ambiguity in his understanding

of science and, therefore, of his own social theory. In the passages of his books where he defends the value neutrality of the sciences, he argues that a theory that robs the sciences of their objectivity transforms sociology into pure propaganda. What he has failed to do until now is show how it is possible to maintain a *dialectical* view of sociology, and at the same time to provide rational norms that allow one to distinguish between commitment-based propaganda and commitment-based demonstrable, publicly valid and in this new sense "objective" conclusions.

THIS UNFINISHED character of Berger's sociology of knowledge casts a shadow upon his entire work. Let us look at one of Berger's great achievements, his sociology of religion. Berger joins Durkheim and Weber in seeing the study of religion as part and parcel of a general theory of society. But what is religion? There are, after all, many definitions. Sociologists and anthropologists argue among themselves which definition deserves most attention. Berger joins this discussion and eventually formulates his own definition—close to Durkheim's—which he likes best and finds most useful in his further investigations. The choice of definition, we note, is understood by Berger as value-neutral scientific procedure: it is a matter of scientific usefulness and in the end follows the maxim of *de gustibus*. It is a matter of taste. And yet when we examine what Berger's choice of a definition leads to in the realm of sociological understanding and practical application we notice that it pushes him quickly into the normative order.

Religion, for Peter Berger, is essentially sacred canopy. It is the highest legitimation of the existing order, highest because it invests this order with sacred meaning. Since society is ever precarious, since the fear of falling back into chaos keeps unsettling us, our desire for certainty and security demands that we invest the social institutions we have inherited with a facticity of their own. We reify them. We repress from memory that social institutions are just people doing things together, we credit the institutions with a reality of their own. They are the way they are by an inner necessity. Berger uses the word "alienation" to characterize the state of mind that has wholly forgotten that the social world is a human construction: this state of mind is "false consciousness." The stability of the social order depends to a large extent upon the degree to which reification has been successful. Alienation has an important social function: it is anthropologically necessary. The human species needs a stable social order for its survival, and there is no social stability without some degree of false consciousness.

Among the several alienating trends operative in the cultural tradition, religion is by far the most powerful. Religion, defined as sacred canopy, is by nature false consciousness. It uses the sacred to propagate the illusion that the social order has an external existence independent of us and that the roles which we occupy in it define in fact who we are as persons. Berger's view recalls a remark of Antonio Gramsci that the Christian belief in God as creator of the world promotes the positivist illusion that the world has an independent existence apart from us. In the Marxist tradition religion is equated with

false consciousness and studied as a source of alienation, but Marxists look upon this alienation as a heavy burden placed upon humanity from which it is ultimately destined to be liberated. For Berger "alienation" is not a pejorative word, it is not value-laden; it refers to something some people may not like, but which is nonetheless an anthropological necessity.

What is the cognitive status of the position, "Some alienation is anthropologically necessary"? Berger proposes it as part of his value-free sociological theory, but since it strengthens the reification of the present order, the reader is bound to ask whether this assertion is not part of the conceptual machinery of universe maintenance. Since Berger does not clarify the relationship between his two distinct views of social science, the reader has no way of resolving the puzzle. Peter Berger acknowledges that religion is not always world-maintaining; it has also been world-shaking. This recognition, after all, determined Max Weber's approach to the sociology of religion. Berger refers especially to the Hebrew prophets and the preaching of Jesus and the early church. In biblical religion, we are told, "the majesty of the transcendent God . . . relativized the [social] order to such an extent that one may validly speak of de-alienating religion." Prophetic religion exercised a "debunking" task: it shook the foundations of the world. Yet we note that in admitting the critical tradition in biblical religion, Berger leaves unmentioned the ancient theme of justice. He notices only "the majesty" of the transcendent God that relativizes the inherited order and says nothing of God's holiness and justice, which spell out a judgment on the social order, condemn the injustices inherent in it, and promise the rectification of the existing ills. "The first shall be last and the last first." Even in his theological writings (as we shall see further on) Berger follows the bent of his definition of religion and severs God's transcendence from his holiness and justice. Important in the present context is only this: while Berger recognizes that religion is both world-maintaining and world-shaking, he chooses the world-maintaining function as his essential definition. Is this just a matter of taste? Or is such a choice associated with value-laden consequences? By defining religion as sacred canopy Berger suggests that critical religion is a rare phenomenon and in fact an anomaly, and since paradigms are heuristic devices, his definition makes critical religion almost invisible.



The definition of ideal types in sociology is not a value-neutral operation. Paradigms have research-guiding power, they create sensitivity to certain data and insensitivities to others, they install themselves in the conclusions of sociological research and thus influence the perception of the social reality, they ultimately favor some policies over others. The definition of religion is not a matter of taste, nor is it an issue that can be settled by scientific arguments involving formal reason alone; the definition of religion in the social sciences is part of the world-constituting process and hence is a substantive issue. It has both theological and political dimensions.

BERGER'S DEFINITION of religion follows him beyond the confines of sociology into his properly theological reflections. In keeping with this definition, he accepts the concept of the sacred as otherness, something *totaliter aliter* compared to the ordinary, profane conditions of human life. Following Rudolf Otto, he argues that the over-againstness of the sacred, testified to all religious tradition, refers to what is meant by divine transcendence. In the following I wish to indicate as briefly as possible how Berger gives this concept of the sacred normative value in Christian theology and derives from it guidelines for ecclesiastical policies.

Over the last few years, Berger has involved himself in theological argumentation and some ecclesiastical politics. He has done this as a Christian believer, as a theologian. He was active in the planning and the publication of the "Hartford Appeal," a list of errors that are said to pervade the theological climate in North American Christianity. What is wrong, we are told, is that Christian theologians are willing to give the results of modern science normative value and attribute to the modern, scientific mentality a definitive status to which they wish to adapt the inherited religion. The "Hartford Appeal" laments that a loss of the sense of transcendence is undermining the churches at this time, Berger returns to this warning in several of his publications. He argues that a growing number of contemporary theologians, Protestant and Catholic, tend to regard the Christian religion as a this-worldly thing, concerned with the transformation of personal and social life, devoid of dimensions of otherness and deprived of all hope for a supernatural world. For these theologians, Berger argues, Christian faith has to do with man's historical project. Now is the time to defend the sense of divine transcendence associated with authentic Christianity. We must regain an appreciation of the sacred.

In one of his articles, in a section entitled "Imprisoned in Modernity," Berger argues that the most useful guide in the understanding of the sacred is Rudolf Otto. The sacred is otherness. The sacred stands out, it puts ordinary life into question, it reveals another world, a hidden world beyond the visible one to which we belong. Measured by this concept of the sacred, it appears that many contemporary Christians have lost interest in divine transcendence, they seem to be wholly absorbed in man's historical existence. The strange irony of this argument is that Peter Berger allows a purely scientific view of the sacred to become normative in theological thinking. To explore the meaning of the sacred and to define what is affirmed by divine transcendence, Christian theologians do not turn to Rudolf Otto; they study the various biblical traditions and engage in the systematic, hermeneutical task of appropriating the meaning of the biblical message for today's world. In this process they may well engage in conversation with Otto's scholarly work. What appears beyond doubt however, though neglected by Otto, is that in the major trends of biblical religion divine transcendence is inextricably linked with holiness and justice. God's majesty makes men tremble not only because the divine wholly transcends human proportions but because God judges the sinful world, and God's

holiness is attractive not only because it offers consolation but because it promises to turn right-side-up a world that has been placed up-side-down by sin. In the Bible the sacred reveals itself as redemptive.

In this argument, then, it is Peter Berger who is imprisoned in modernity. Judged by the dominant biblical understanding of divine transcendence, Otto's idea of the holy and Berger's sacred canopy are not transcendent at all! They leave the world as it is, they do not judge social injustice nor promise that things will be set right. From the biblical perspective, ecstasies and elevations have nothing to do with divine transcendence unless they mediate salvation from sin and entry into new life. In the Christian religion, theologians have argued, the doctrine that in Jesus Christ God is present to men and that the Holy Spirit transforms the face of the earth means that men need not leave history to encounter the transcendent God. The human project itself inasmuch as it is a struggle for justice and an entry into love and community is the locus of divine self-communication. The doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity make Christianity a religion of the earth.

We have introduced these theological remarks because Berger occasionally leaves sociology to apply his scientific conclusions to properly theological reflections. Why, we must ask, is Berger so eager to defend Otto's view of the sacred against the drift of much of contemporary Christian theology? Why does he attack the theologians for whom the gospel is the proclamation of God's gracious entry into man's making of man and hence has to do with the remaking of this world? As a Christian believer Berger is concerned with the well-being of the churches. He fears that the present concern of the churches with social justice and the critique of society touches only a small minority of Christians. Since a growing movement among Christians, with some impact on church policies, has begun to criticize corporate capitalism itself, the churches are in danger of moving away from where the majority of their people are. By offending and confusing their constituency, they are preparing their own undoing. Berger realizes that his defense of Otto's notion of divine transcendence as theologically normative appears at the moment as an attack on the left wing of the churches. He admits that the Hartford Appeal hits "liberation theology at this time, even though tomorrow, who knows, it may be directed with equal force against a new upsurge of right-wing religion." For the moment, then, Berger's entry into a theological debate aims at discrediting the Christian left.

As indicated before, the unresolved interrelation between Berger's two views of social science, the *objective* and the *dialectical*, casts a shadow over his entire work. Let us look for a moment at his major scholarly achievement, the analysis of modernity and its effect on consciousness. All of his books deal in one way or another with this central theme.

THERE ARE TWO classical ways of analyzing the ills of modernity, one typified by Karl Marx, the other by Max Weber. For Marx it was the economic system, that is to say the organization of production in a world of scarcity, that has the

decisive influence on consciousness, and for this reason the ills of the modern age must be derived from the contradictions of capitalist production. For Weber, on the other hand, following thinkers such as Tocqueville and Toennies, technological rationality and bureaucratic administration have the major impact on modern consciousness, and while economic factors must not be neglected, the impact of "technocracy" is so powerful, so overwhelming, that it has the same effects whether the economy is organized along capitalist or socialist lines.

Sociologists on the whole reject superficial theories of monocausality, i.e., they recognize a variety of material and ideal factors in the creation of modern consciousness. Still, they must choose to which of the two classical theories they assign the predominant place. Such a choice, needless to say, has important political consequences. According to Berger, the predominant mood of Western intellectuals favors the Marxian analysis of modernity and hence encourages left-wing political trends, while he himself is a defender of the Weberian analysis of modernity. The left-wing intellectuals choose the Marxian paradigm out of bias; Berger chooses the Weberian paradigm on the basis of his value-free, objective scientific approach. Berger demonstrates that the dehumanization which threatens modern man and makes him homeless in this world is produced by industrialization and its intellectual and organizational demands. The idea that a socialist organization of production could make an industrialized society more human and more humane is a myth and a dangerous illusion.

Berger does not deny the impact of economic institutions on consciousness and the ways of modernity. In his brilliant book *The Homeless Mind*, written with two other sociologists, his wife Brigitte Berger and his brother-in-law Hansfried Kellner, he repeatedly acknowledges the impact on consciousness of factors of economic production, but he leaves these factors curiously undeveloped. His major attention and his ingenious analytical power are extended to the impact of technocracy. However, in his *Pyramids of Sacrifice* Berger concludes his analysis of the economic situation of Brazil with an image that seems to point in the opposite direction. The economic map of Brazil, Berger argues, can be described as a Sweden superimposed on an Indonesia. The government-sponsored capitalism of Brazil has produced for about 20 percent of the population a highly developed economy and a correspondingly high standard of living, while the rest of the population, the great majority of the people, have been pushed back into greater destitution and are being decimated by untimely mortality. Here at least, in Brazil, the economic contradiction is so enormous that it is the principal cause of dehumanization associated with the growing technocratic system. In Brazil, Berger argues, class interest reveals itself as the motor force of human misery. In Brazil and other Third World countries, Berger reasons, socialism may well be a rational choice. But this is not true, he argues, in the United States and other developed nations. The economic map of the U.S. does not show a Sweden superimposed on an Indonesia: it would be wrong to assign predominance to economic factors and class

conflict in the analysis of the homelessness of modern man.

While one must agree with Berger that the Sweden/Indonesia paradigm is not useful for an understanding of economic life in the U.S., the question that cannot be avoided, however, is whether the whole world, the global society, is not divided into a Sweden over against an Indonesia, i.e., the highly developed, industrial sectors over against the underdeveloped world. He himself seems to think it is. But if this is so, then in looking at the total picture of modernity, the "economic" paradigm must be given predominance, and in the analysis of industrialization one must always keep in mind the economic powers that are served by technological reason and bureaucratic administration. According to Berger, this seems to be the kind of reasoning that is widely accepted among social scientists today.

Still, in his own analysis Berger follows the Weberian paradigm and concentrates on the alienating effect of technocracy. While Berger recognized the humanizing intention of the trends in society that seek to "demodernize," i.e., limit the impact of instrumental rationality on knowledge and social organization, he shows that these demodernizing trends have clearly defined boundaries. In Berger's view the youth movement in the sixties and the counter-cultures associated with it, following not Marx but Weber, recognized that technocracy was the source of man's homelessness, but they became hysterical over this, they asked for the impossible, and hence the movement was irrational and dangerous. Berger comes back to this theme again and again. He dislikes the youth movement: he tries to show that it contained no important message addressed to society as a whole. The protest movements of the sixties did not bring to light the social injustices made invisible by the dominant culture nor the depersonalizing power of modern industrial capitalism. Berger tries to explain the youth movement largely with reference to three social factors: (1) the new child-rearing methods adopted by middle-class parents in the fifties made young people overly sensitive to the inevitable toughness of social life; (2) the growing perfection of industrial technology made the labor market incapable of absorbing the young people graduating from schools and colleges; and (3) the knowledge industry, carried on by intellectuals out of a resentment proper to their group, produced myths of alternative societies, among them the socialist myth, which concentrated on the negative elements of the American dream, appealed to the restlessness produced by modernity, undermined the achievement orientation of western culture, and attacked the class system to which America is committed. The counter-culture was taken far too seriously even by policy-makers. Berger reproaches the Christian churches for giving credence to the critical voices of the sixties and integrating some of their concerns into their theology and practice. The churches, he feels, are in danger of losing their nerve.

Scientific reason demands that we recognize demodernizing trends in society as having clearly defined boundaries. These boundaries can be demonstrated. "We are stuck with them." There is no transcendence. There is nothing we can do about them. But once we honor these boundary lines, we may be able

to create certain islands relatively free of technocratic impact and seek refreshment at these oases of more truly human existence.

We are stuck with the world as it is. This is the conclusion of social-scientific analysis. But here the puzzlement emerges again. The principal function of social science, Berger has explained to us, is to legitimate the existing order, to provide persuasive rational arguments that we are stuck with the world as it is, that there is a certain inner necessity for things to be the way they are. Are Berger's sociological conclusions simply a profane canopy for modern capitalist society? He insists that his sociological analysis is value-free and objective. But because the relation between the two views, the *objective* and the *dialectical*, remains unreflected, Berger does not supply the readers with criteria that enable them to test whether his conclusions are simply a rational effort at legitimation or demonstrable, publicly valid knowledge.

SOCIALISM IS a heretical world view in North America: it undermines the fundamental assumptions upon which society is based. In an interesting section of *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger tells us how theoreticians, whether they are theologians, philosophers or social scientists, deal with heresies. This section is ingenious and entertaining, and precisely because it is so delightful (like so much of Berger's writing) the reader wonders to what extent it should be taken seriously. Heretics are deviates in society who propagate dangerous ideas. To defend itself society deals harshly with them, it uses political power to curtail their influence and it relies on its theoreticians to produce new conceptual machinery of universe maintenance to immunize the people against the heresy. Berger discusses various intellectual procedures used for this purpose by philosophers and social scientists. For one, it may be necessary to present the heretics as foolish or wicked; they do not deserve to be taken seriously. Social science must show that the heretical views are laughable, lacking a sound rational foundation, based largely on myths and illusions. Or it must be shown that behind the heretical views stand self-serving interests or a morally questionable impatience with the existing order. Secondly, Berger argues that in dealing with heresy social scientists must find more ingenious legitimations for the present order by integrating into them some of the insights of the heretics, possibly in a slightly more modified form, as long as this does not invalidate the official self-definition of society. In this manner, Berger argues, theoreticians make the official symbolic universe less vulnerable to the heretical views. Yet the conflict between heresy and society's official self-definition, Berger argues, will not be resolved by rational argument. It will not be settled on the intellectual level, however important the conceptual legitimations may be. Ultimately the conflict over alternative society definitions will be resolved by power. Those who have "the bigger stick," Berger reasons, will be able to make their definitions stick.

In these paragraphs, Berger stresses a functional view of social science that leaves little room for the truth question, for

Berger often studies theoretical controversies simply in terms of the social role they play and brackets the truth question altogether. . . . At the same time, he wants the readers to understand his own ideas in terms of their content, not their social function.

"the good deal" of detachment from social interest, let alone for the possibility of value neutrality. Because of this functional view of ideas Berger often studies theoretical controversies simply in terms of the social role they play and brackets the truth question altogether. Even personal conversation is often looked upon as a way of defining personal identity: dialogue is understood as part of the self-constitution of individuals. While Berger is not a functionalist (far from it—he thinks the social reality is a most precarious construction), he often concentrates on a purely functional understanding of ideas, theories, and concepts. At the same time, he wants the readers to understand his own ideas in terms of their content, not their social function. What he fails to do is supply a method for deciding when an idea or an argument should be looked at from a functionalist viewpoint and when it should be studied as an objective issue. This lack of methodological clarity introduces an enormous ambiguity in Berger's discussion of socialism.

Berger repeatedly returns to the subject of socialism. He regards socialist social scientists as ideologically committed and hence does not credit their conclusions with much reliability. He tends to look upon their sociological conclusions in terms of their social function, i.e., propaganda, while he understands his own social science in terms of its objective content. In his writings against socialism he uses the conceptual strategies against heresies previously outlined in a theoretical manner. Heretics are either foolish or wicked. Socialist intellectuals, we are told, are romantics, attached to a myth, unwilling to face scientific evidence, ready to exploit the discontent produced by modernity, or else they are filled with resentment, jealous of the power enjoyed by the successful people in business and industry. At other times, Berger concedes some of the points made by the heretics as long as they do not undermine the official definition of society. Thus he admits that socialism may be an excellent idea in Third World countries where class oppression has a brutal visibility, but in North America it remains anathema.

In the light of the unresolved relationship between the two views of social science, the *objective* and *dialectical*, which of these two views should be given more weight? I personally attach more importance to Berger's theoretical position that social science is part of the world-constructing process, that it is dialectically related to the social base from which it springs, and that it can have legitimating or delegitimizing social ef-

fects. Is it possible to integrate into this dialectical view the concern for the objectivity of science, its demonstrable, publicly valid nature? This question is the preoccupation of critical theory. Critical theorists, if I may use this term, would agree with Berger's dialectical view of social science. For this reason they demand that social scientists clarify for themselves their social interests, subject them to a rational critique and assume ethico-political responsibility for them. (If critical theorists are Christian theologians, they will want to subject the social interests implicit in their scientific projects also to a theological critique and assume theologically based ethico-political responsibility for them.)

Secondly, critical theorists demand that social scientists specify the norms which allow them to distinguish their conclusions from wishful thinking, propaganda, and conceptual machinery of universe maintenance and affirm them as demonstrable science, publicly valid, acceptable to the community of scholars. Karl Mannheim spoke here of the quest for "a new objectivity." Since society is constantly being constructed, truth in social science cannot possibly be defined in terms of the conformity of the mind to the social world as it is. Why not? Because social science is part of the society-building process and hence affects the reality it tries to understand. The norms of truth in social science must in some way refer to its social impact and its link to a rationally defensible vision of society. It is this vision that exercises a research-guiding role: it affects the questions that are being asked, the selection of the empirical evidence, and the paradigms and conceptual instruments used in the inquiry. Implied in this position is that it is impossible to do social science without engaging in a rational, substantive discussion on human destiny.

IS IT POSSIBLE to complete Berger's sociology of knowledge by clarifying, within his system, the relationship between the two views of social science, objective and dialectical? The task is a difficult one, for two reasons. The consistent bracketing of the truth question in the service of scientific objectivity makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to move from formal to substantive thinking. Even as a moralist Berger shies away from the rational definitions of justice: he develops a utilitarian social ethics based on a calculus of happiness and misery resulting from public policy. Secondly, since Berger's sociology recognizes no substantive self there seems to be no organ that can gain control of the historical process reflexively and elaborate a reason that lays claim to universality.

Berger's view of the self is perhaps the most vulnerable element of his sociology of knowledge. While Marx often argued that the human person was just "an ensemble of social relations," he nonetheless defended a normative view of the human person in his writings, the enforced deviation from which he labeled "alienation." Berger with unhappy consistency regards the self simply as an ensemble of social relations. We are defined by the roles into which we have been socialized, first in childhood through the significant others, the family, and later in life through the various social worlds into which we move. This socialization is never total: it never

imprisons the total self. Thanks to man's biological nature and, it would appear, his meaning-creating drive, there remain in man ever unpredictable impulses that threaten the social definition of the self. In this sense "the total self," as Berger calls it, transcends the roles with which we have identified. But this total self is not the true person; it has no consciousness, it is simply the totality of the socialized and unsocialized elements of the human organism. The experience of self, of being a person, is only possible if we invest the roles assigned to us as having some special weight, as revealing our true nature, as defining our identity. The experience of myself as a person, a self, implies the repression from consciousness that my self has been socially constructed: a reification of the socialization process. I am a self only thanks to false consciousness. And since the total self, i.e., the several roles to which I have been introduced and the as yet unsocialized vital

impulses, threatens my self-understanding. I can protect my identity only by rushing more deeply into alienation. Alienation, Berger argues, is anthropologically necessary not only because it stabilizes the social order but also and especially because without it there is no personal self-identity. It would seem then, that there is nothing in the person that can, by reflection, rise above the historical process of self-constitution and elaborate a substantive rationality.

Because of the unresolved theoretical problem of relating the two views of social science, Berger is able to affirm cheerfully the value neutrality of his own work. Curiously enough, Berger has accused theologians of living in a "methodological sanctuary," an abstract world that avoids certain kinds of self-examination. Yet until now Berger himself has dismissed the critical perspective that asks about the social foundations of his own work and its social impact.

AUTHOR OF 'FINAL PAYMENTS' ON RELIGION & THE NOVEL



An interview with Mary Gordon

DIANA COOPER-CLARK

DIANE COOPER-CLARK: *How do you feel about the critical response to Final Payments? Did you find it particularly perceptive?*

MARY GORDON: I thought Wilfrid Sheed's review in *The New York Review of Books* was. And that was about it. Every now and again somebody says something that you like to hear, but it turned out that only the Sheed review was instructive to me.

DCC: *In your view what is the function of the critic?*

MG: To make known good things that are around so that people want to read them. I don't think about criticism in terms of setting standards. For me the ideal critic would be Virginia Woolf; somebody who says, "This is wonderful. You should really read this for this particular reason."

DIANA COOPER-CLARK teaches in the English and Humanities departments of York University in Toronto.

DCC: *Do you believe in such a thing as the "function" of the novel, of literature?*

MG: Pleasure. If it's accidentally instructive, that's all to the good. But its main function is to be beautiful and, in some sense, true in a very large way I can't even begin to explain. Again Virginia Woolf, "What I want to do is to tell the truth and to create something of beauty." I think that's what the novel is supposed to do. I don't think it makes people any better. If that were true, English departments would be the moral paragons of this or any other age. And anyone who has taught for two minutes knows that they are not. I am very attracted to formal beauty. I like a well-made piece of work. I like balance, so that's very important to me. I'm by nature a Classicist. I am by nature anti-Romantic.

DCC: *How do you define the religious novel? I know you were doing a course on the religious novel last year. Now I'm thinking for instance that Paul Tillich, the Protestant theologian, defines the re-*

ligious as something of honesty and ultimate concern, and he said that a rock by Cezanne is more religious than Christ on the cross by a sentimental German painter named Uhde. How do you feel about that definition of the "religious"?

MG: I think it's nonsense because it devalues both the religious experience and the experience of Cezanne. All beauty is not religious in its nature, and all aesthetic or heartfelt responses are not religious, and I don't like that kind of sloppiness. For me the religious novel would be something which had a relationship to God at the center of it. No, I don't think that swimming in the ocean is as religious an act as contemplative prayer, which is not to say that one is more valuable than the other. If you call everything religious, then nothing is religious.

DCC: *And so Final Payments would not be a religious novel by that definition, or would it?*

MG: Well, it's certainly not a religious novel in the way that one of Mauriac's would be, or one of Bernanos's, but I

think that Isabel is searching, trying to come to terms with her religious life. I would not say that her path of self-identification is a religious path, but in that she is so formed by religion and really sees everything in metaphors of Catholicism so much, I think it is.

DCC: *And to pick up that point of using Roman Catholicism as a metaphor, do you think that the more secular world that we live in today has anaesthetized people to the symbolic world, to the understanding or the sensibility of the symbolic, and has this changed writing styles, writing approaches?*

MG: What's happened doesn't have to do with secularism, it has to do with communication. A symbol has to have a kind of thickness to it; something that has to build up over time for people really to be able to respond to it, and I think the whole tenor and tempo of the age is something . . . the symbol of our age would have to be something very evanescent because we're not interested in things that accrete over time, that build up meaning over time, and also if everybody's getting the same kind of stimuli all over the world, which people now are, I don't think there's going to be very much chance for the particular symbol . . . I don't think it has much to do with religion, I think it has to do with the speed at which we live and our terrible disregard for history, because a symbol only takes on meaning as it attaches to the past.

DCC: *Wallace Fowlie has stated: "American literature is quite thoroughly non-Catholic. There has never been in this country anything that would resemble a Catholic school of letters or movement in literature." Do you agree?*

MG: Yes I do. Sure, it makes a lot of sense. The Catholic church in America is an immigrant church. And immigrants were worried about making money and surviving, and learning was a threat to the family. The more you learned, the more likely you were to leave home. The Catholic church in America has been phenomenally anti-intellectual. To go to school and to study philosophy or literature or art is very different because it's learning that won't get you anywhere,

except out of the community. And they're right. What is touching and moving is the loneliness of the immigrant experience, always feeling an outsider, always defining yourself as "not Protestant," and even later on as "not Jewish," knowing that you somehow never had access to the real power, and kind of looking in with your nose pressed against the window. Also I think that's very much a feature of Catholicism in America.

It's also a profoundly anti-sexual tradition, and that's a big problem with it in a way that the French Catholics really aren't and the Italian Catholics really aren't. Irish Catholicism is very anti-sexual, and the sexy people get out of the church; they have to. What you're left with is a marvelous ascetic type who stays in the church, or a person like Flannery O'Connor who's a virgin through and through, one of those wise and fierce Antigones. They can stay and be quite interesting and quite admirable, but the sexual people have to get out.

DCC: *Who do you consider to be the best Catholic writers?*

MG: Bernanos I think is the greatest. And Mauriac, who's very great, Flannery O'Connor, although she's a Catholic writer who never writes about Catholics. . . . Graham Greene, a wonderful writer.

DCC: *How about somebody like Waugh or Muriel Spark? Do you consider them Catholic writers?*

MG: Well they'd like to be considered Catholic writers. I don't know. I have a lot of trouble with Muriel Spark. She's awfully thin to me. And Waugh was a brilliant stylist, and I even like *Brideshead Revisited*, which about three people in the world do. . . .

DCC: *The Christian in our society must confront certain essential paradoxes of her faith. On the one hand, she is taught the need to lose one's life in order to save it. The lives and writings of saints and ascetics illustrate this impulse toward retirement and withdrawal. On the other hand, the Incarnation, by which God became man, and dwelt among men in the world and in history*

with all of its evils, defies this withdrawal. Therefore the Christian lives both in heaven and earth. Does the character of Isabel in any way embody this paradox?

MG: Yes, it's something I think about all the time. It's a terrible paradox; having a body even as Christ had a body with affections and needs and connections and yet knowing or sensing somehow that there's this angelic realm that you might almost have access to if you just give up this body. But it seems to me that the impulse of charity comes from the Incarnation, comes from going out. I've always wondered how a contemplative can fulfill his obligation in charity because in some ways it's a profoundly egocentric life. You spend all of your time getting rid of your flesh and the hell with everybody else's flesh; if they're starving and leprous, that's their tough luck.

DCC: *Carl Jung believed that religion binds humanity together. Do you agree?*

MG: No. I think it probably separates men, one from the other. If you got two people together talking about religion they'd usually disagree, but if you got people talking about the way they felt about their children they'd probably agree. Human affection is much more universal than religion.

DCC: *What is the meaning of Isabel's sacrifice? She has given up her life for her father but she makes that statement "not with self-pity but with extreme pride." But sacrifice in the book, especially with Margaret, seems to be more than the "pride of sacrifice," the "romance of devotion," the idea of martyrdom.*

MG: What was very important to me was to make the distinction between genuine sacrifice motivated not only by love but by affection which seems to me to be of immense importance in life. The kind of sacrifice that Isabel practiced in relation to Margaret is a kind of theft, sacrifice for its own sake without any movement of the heart. Sacrifice as an abstraction is hateful unless you really want to. Certainly there would be points when the person is physically appalling to you at that particular time. But unless

you have a memory of a stirring in the heart, I think you have no right to sacrifice.

DCC: *What do you like best and what do you like least about your work?*

MG: What I like best is that sometimes I think I write really smashing sentences. What I like least is that there are certain things that I just can't do. I fear a narrowness of range. I can never write about violence. Physical violence. I'm not very good at young men, men who have a sexual identity. And I wish I were better. But Flannery O'Connor says that everything that is important to a writer she learns before the age of eight and I was brought up in a very female-centric world. But I wish . . . I find men so incomprehensible that I can't write about them very well.

DCC: *In his review, Peter Prescott said that the best men and the most convincing in Final Payments are the invalid father and the alcoholic priest, both of whom are "unsexed." You do agree with him.*

MG: Yes. I have to do something terrible to my sexual men in order to understand them (laughs). I can't write sympathetically about a normally sexed man.

DCC: *I would like your opinion on various attitudes toward the contemporary novel. First, the whole death of the novel debate between, for example, Cheever and Fowles who assert that the novel is alive and well versus Vidal and Capote who maintain that it is a dying art form and that journalism, magazines are taking over. What do you think about all that?*

MG: I haven't thought much about it. I think that Capote and Vidal write journalism because they can't write novels, and infinitely would rather be writing novels but they can't, they're blocked. So I don't know; I suppose people don't need novels very much now, and that's sad, but I think it's their attention span.

DCC: *Robert Scholes. I don't know if you're familiar with him; he's an academic modernist, he's a scholar and he advocates fictional fabulation, structural fabulation. This is the world, the Barth theme world, that would go beyond*

and ignore historical reality in order to create self-sufficient worlds like Pynchon, Gaddis, etc.

MG: Let them do it as long as I don't ever have to read it. I just find it totally boring. I'm interested in the novel as a form of high gossip and the more the novel gets away from gossip, the less I'm interested in reading it. I want to know about Jane and Mister Rochester. I want to know about Dorothy and Elizabeth Bennett. I want to know what happens to Sue Bridehead. I don't particularly like the Barth, Vonnegut, Barthelme trip where literature is about literature. I wouldn't want to say that they are wrong, that's not the way novels are to be written. I could change my mind in ten years. I never want to read *Finnegans Wake*; *Finnegans Wake* is about language, it's not about people. I think novels should be about people. Novels that are basically tricks to show us what writing a novel is really about, I'm not interested in. On the other hand, Virginia Woolf's my favorite novelist, and it seems to me she does all the stylization you could ever want to do, but doesn't move away from character, and so I think if they're crabbing they should just go and read Virginia Woolf and shut up (laughs).

DCC: *How about Anaïs Nin and her notion of abstraction and the future of the novel?*

MG: She's such a dumb . . . I just can't understand all that.

DCC: *Which writers in the past do you*

admire, then?

MG: My favorite novelist is Jane Austen, and then I love Charlotte Brontë, and I love Hardy, and I love George Eliot, and I love Ford Maddox Ford. He's one of my favorites. I think I'm going to have to put him third after Woolf and Austen.

DCC: *Would you consider any of these major influences to the point that you say that they influenced you in style or content?*

MG: Virginia Woolf did. I was writing a dissertation on her when I was writing *Final Payments*, and I was copying out—I never finished it—but I was copying out passages of her novel in the afternoons, and I was writing my own work in the mornings, and I learned so much about prose writing from her.

DCC: *Does your writing draw heavily from your own life? I'm thinking of Final Payments and short stories like "The Thorn," "Now I Am Married," "The Other Woman."*

MG: I feel more free to be autobiographical in short stories than in novels. Somehow talking about yourself for ten pages is okay, but talking about yourself for three hundred pages is a bit much. *Final Payments*—I've said this a million times—is not about me, but I'm tempted to that setting; the setting of Irish Catholicism. But if you write a good novel who cares where it comes from. Virginia Woolf says about Charlotte Brontë: "always to be a governess and



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always to be in love is no advantage in a world in which most people are neither." On the other hand, we have *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* and I'm terribly glad we do. I don't care that she was being autobiographical. I care about the novel.

DCC: *Virginia Woolf said that there's such a thing as a female sentence. She never expanded on it. But there are people who are working to create a feminist criticism. And a lot of female artists insist that female metaphors, for example, are very different. . . .*

MG: It might be true, but it's nothing I think about. I mean, I wonder about it, but I certainly don't wonder about it while I'm writing. I think it's much more simple than that; I think that women have a proclivity, women are trained to be more associative, and they're trained to be more interested in human relations, and so that's what they're going to tend to write about in their novels. That's what I'm interested in, and because I think other things are trivial, I'm perfectly happy with that. I don't read many novels that don't have women in them, I don't read many novels about men shooting up other men and finding out what their penises are for. That bores me to death. I'll read about what happens in the drawing room in Somerset by the hands of Jane Austen for fifty years, but don't ever ask me to read Conrad again.

DCC: *Well you have met with tremendous success, and Graham Greene said something marvelous: "For the serious writer as for the priest, there is no such thing as success."*

MG: Except in practical terms, if you have some money you have more time, and that's important. But on a profound level it's perfectly true: the only thing that matters is what you're doing in front of the page, and this has nothing to do with what anybody thinks about it.

DCC: *Diane Keaton took an option on Final Payments. Can mediums be transferred? John Cheever says no.*

MG: I don't think about it. If they make a movie I have nothing to do with it.

DCC: *You would prefer it done well, but—*

MG: Sure, but if it means that I could

buy a house in Cape Cod, I would like to have a house in Cape Cod. I would feel terrific responsibility for anything I wrote. But because it's a different medium, I feel no responsibility for it. Even if they did it well, it wouldn't be mine anymore, so good luck to them. I just don't want to hear about it.

DCC: *What is the role of an editor? You have published in Redbook, Mademoiselle, etc. Is there any kind of critical help on their part? Or is it a fait accompli when the story is submitted?*

MG: You have to be very tough. If they say we are going to cut out the whole middle paragraph because we have an ad for shampoo there, you just have to say "Well, you can't do that." They cut things up and you just have to be ferocious.

DCC: *That's outrageous. Isabel feels that her father's stroke cleanses her sin and is "the mechanism of forgiveness." What is the nature of her sin?*

MG: Betraying her father.

DCC: *Well, that leads me to the next question. The relationship between Isabel and her father is emotionally incestuous. They are "connected by flesh;" her sexual relationship with David is a kind of punishment because her father is not jealous; she says that she has "borne the impress of his body all my life;" she keeps Margaret from her father and is jealous that he has sent her money, written to her and sent her Christmas presents; she's angry at Eleanor's confession that she had sexual fantasies about her father; Isabel says: "I loved him more than anyone else;" her father says: "I love you more than I love God. I love you more than God loves you." What part does this play in the motion of Isabel's life?*

MG: Well, it's overwhelmingly clear. I do want to say that there is something overwhelming about their love for one another and not quite right. Romantic and compelling as it is, there's no way for her to be an adult as long as her father is alive. So although it is very attractive because it is so all-consuming, it is in some sense damaging to her as what we would call a healthy person. But she manages to survive it because there is

that love there. Another writer that I love is Tillie Olsen and one of the messages of Tillie Olsen that has been very instructive to me is that even 'warped' love is somehow life giving and in the end it will probably come out okay. I do believe that in some sort of very primitive way. That love, that any passionate attachment is all to the good.

DCC: *In your excellent article on Archbishop Lefebvre, I felt that the modern world disappoints you. It is Kresge's not Balmain's. Is there a world where words like "sublime," "miracle," "mystery," "immutability," "the impossible," are realized and compatible with "certainty" and "authority"?*

MG: Probably, but it would be such an awful world that I would never want to live there. People do such terrible things in the search for certainty and sublimity. You could say that's what the Nazis were looking for. That really is the root of totalitarianism. I think one must hunger for that and yet not try to put it into practice. But as a hunger it makes you much more interesting.

DCC: *In reference to your next book, you said that you "want to be talking about women and their spiritual mentors, and the female habit of abdicating responsibility for their inner lives to the men—priests, lovers—who in one way or another compel them." Could you expand on that?*

MG: I think we've always thought that anything not rooted in the flesh is the realm of men. So that if a woman had aspirations to be anything but rooted in the flesh, she had to go to another man for it. And he would tell her what she was really like. She would never go to another woman because she was mucking around in the same 'unsublime' area. And this kind of habit of women saying 'tell me what I'm like' to a man and believing him against all sorts of evidence, and then being willing to radically change your life is a very big pattern in everything from professors and students, to husbands and wives, to the Manson family, and it just seems to have very strong ramifications. Women believe that men have all the interesting data in some way. I hope it's changing now.

Dance

BALLET MEMOIRS

DANCE BOOKS REPRINTED

AS A PASSIONATE bookstore browser I have occasionally had the luck to find an out-of-print edition that I desperately wanted to add to my library. More often, however I am disappointed: the first-edition market is in the speculative grip of the stock exchange mentality. Fortunately for dance books the Da Capo reprint series has recently come to the rescue.

Since the instigation of their series under the general editorship of Dale Harris, a conscious effort has been made to offer a list balanced between the scholarly treatise and the lively memoir. It has been successful and has made available some real treasures such as *The Continental Method of Scene Painting* (\$22.50, 85 pp.) by Vladimir Polunin. The first part of the text does indeed go deeply into the actual process of preparing theatrical scenery, but the joy of the book is the second half devoted to Polunin's work with Serge Diaghilev's pioneering Ballets Russes, a revolutionary departure from the old Imperial Ballet system.

This encounter between craftsman and artistic director is one of the few self-conscious instances where we are able to experience the immediacy of Diaghilev's meticulousness in all aspects of production. Despite his continuing need for money to support the critically successful but financially draining company, Diaghilev never compromised on the quality of the productions he placed before the public. A typical exchange occurred in the painting of "Contes Russes." Polunin: "It is impossible to find any vermillion, and the other red tones available are all very bad." Diaghilev: "There is no interest in achieving the possible but it is exceedingly interesting to perform the impossible." Needless to say, Polunin found the pigment. Picasso, Derain, Benois, and Bakst are all commented upon in a book whose only fault is that it is too short.

Benois himself, who was one of the founding members of the Ballets Russes, contributed strongly to the success of the early Diaghilev seasons, and his *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet* (\$29.50, 414 pp.) details his efforts there and elsewhere. By temperament a finicky and querulous man, his relations with Diaghilev were strained to the breaking point many times before he severed all ties with the company.

Inadvertently he contributed to Nijinsky's departure from the Imperial Ballet by designing an exact period reproduction of the doublet and hose worn by the male in the original French production of "Giselle" in 1841. Upon Nijinsky's return to St. Petersburg from his summer's success in Paris, he elected to wear the same costume and refused to have it altered or wear the dumpy shorts that were offered to him as a compromise. He

was suspended after the performance which the Dowager Empress attended and never again danced in Russia. The costume essentially is the one that is today worn throughout the world, including Russia, but the propriety of the times dictated otherwise.

Another great figure of the time who emerged from the Imperial Ballet and also danced with the Ballets Russes was Anna Pavlova, the subject of a collection of essays, *Pavlova* (\$19.50, 144 pp.), among which is a charming memoir by Fokine. The two had been in the Imperial Academy together and were highly esteemed as a team. It was for her that he created "The Dying Swan." In fact, the two disagreed artistically and it's highly ironic that this little solo he designed for her has become one of his most enduring creations.

Pavlova's subsequent career consisted of worldwide touring, and this aspect of her professional life is treated in an adoring memoir *Flight of the Swan* (\$19.50, 285 pp.) by André Oliveroff, an American boy from Montclair, New Jersey, who russified his name and became a member of her company. The recollections are slight for the most part, but do convey a sense of the dedication that Pavlova brought to her art. It simply was her life!

Lydia Kyasht of *Romantic Recollections* (\$19.50, 247 pp.) danced with Nijinsky at the Maryinsky and tells of her life there and subsequently on variety entertainment bills in London. *Dancing in Petersburg* (\$25, 273 pp.) is a view from the top by Mathilde Kschessinska, the first native-born Russian "ballerina assoluta," who displaced the need for the Imperial theaters to import virtuosic Italian stars for major productions. Kschessinska equaled their skills—and doubly assuring her success—was Nicholas II's mistress. She left before being swept away by the Revolution and ended her years in affluent retirement, married to a Grand Duke in Paris. She was a powerhouse of energy both on stage and off, though the ever-present first person singular in her memoirs does get a bit wearying.

The edifice upon which all of these talents rested was the Imperial school system, and an integral part of it was Enrico Cecchetti, who taught all of the above and performed with some of them. Diaghilev subsequently attached him to his émigré Ballets Russes and sent him his best dancers for polishing. Cecchetti's pedagogical methods were sound and molded a further generation of dancers when he settled in England. Olga Racster's *The Master of the Russian Ballet* (\$19.50, 303 pp.) traces his career warmly from its beginnings in Italy (as a child performer in 1855) to his immensely successful teaching years, which ended only with his death in 1928. Natalia Roslavleva's *Era Of The Russian Ballet* (\$25, 320 pp.) takes a scholarly overview of the whole of Russian dancing from early folk efforts through its Imperial era and right down to the mid-sixties when the Soviet style dominated. An erudite and sympathetic critic, she does an honorable job of making sense of this artistic course though her tendency to disparage any creative efforts made by émigré Russians smacks more of politics than scholarship. In the face of her considerable accomplishment it is a small blemish.

The pre-ballet world is scrupulously presented by Mabel Dolmetsch in two volumes *The Dances of Spain and Italy From 1400 to 1600* (\$19.50, 174 pp.) and *Dances of England and France 1450 to 1600* (\$19.50, 163 pp.). Drawing on meticulous research in old sources she makes the basse dance, bransle, gailliard, and pavan live with lively descriptions and accompanying musical quotations.

Modern dance pioneers are celebrated through the eyes of sympathetic observers like Caroline and Charles H. Caffin in *Dancing and Dancers of Today* (\$25, 301 pp.) which captures Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan, Ruth St. Denis, and Grete Wiesenthal of the emerging Central European school during the heat of their revolutionary activity. Ted Shawn (St. Denis's husband) who was also one of those pioneers shows that world from the inside with his exuberant autobiography *One Thousand and One Night Stands* (\$6.95, paper, 288 pp.) and Merle Armitage's *Martha Graham: the Early Years* (\$19.50, cloth, \$5.95, paper, 133 pp.) is a landmark collection of essays that has yet to be bettered on that artist's creative greatness.

In the ballroom no couple has been more celebrated than Irene and Vernon Castle and her *My Husband* (\$19.50, 275 pp.) recounts their disappointments and successes. This is a classic "rags to riches" show business story, engaging because of its simplicity and genuineness. They loved one another, they danced beautifully, and they believed in each other's talent. Irene survived her husband by decades of retirement after he was killed instructing student flyers during World War I.

The series promises to continue making these important documents available with an admirable catholicity of taste and should prove to be a boon both for the general reader and the more specialized dance scholar and historian.

DON McDONAGH

Screen

FAITH IN THE SYSTEM

A BRIEF FOR ALGER HISS

IN THE previous issue I was discussing Ira Wohl's *Best Boy*, which is about the life of Wohl's 52-year-old cousin Philly who is mentally retarded. This time I want to talk about another recent documentary whose subject is also the life of just one man, though a man about as different from Philly Wohl as is imaginable: Alger Hiss. Hiss is of course the man whom Whittaker Chambers named as a Communist before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the late 1940s. Up until that time, Hiss had had the sort of career in government service which is usually described as "brilliant." He had clerked for Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, been appointed to a post at the policy-making level in the New Deal, accompanied Roosevelt to Yalta, and helped draft the U.N. Charter. But Chambers's accusations put an end to all

that. They ultimately led beyond the Congressional hearings to two trials for perjury in the federal courts. At the second of these Hiss was convicted and given a five-year prison sentence.

Best Boy is an appealing film because it shows what a decent place the world can be sometimes. Its world is admittedly a small and very private one. Yet all the people in it from Philly's parents to his teachers to cousin Ira himself are so protective of Philly that we can't help being generally encouraged about things. The world in which Alger Hiss has spent his life is, to say the least, not so full of sweet and good-natured people. It is a large and very public world, and a pretty rough one. Before the credits are even over, John Lowenthal's *The Trials of Alger Hiss* gives us some evidence of just how rough it can be. Along with those credits Lowenthal includes a list of people who refused to be interviewed for this film. Most of them are Hiss's old enemies, so we are a bit surprised and puzzled to notice that among their names that of Priscilla Hiss appears.

Unlike *Best Boy*, whose power derives from the direct, spontaneous emotions people show in it, *The Trials of Alger Hiss* contains almost no visible emotion. (Chambers is the only person involved who seems to have displayed his emotions, which, because they are his, are theatrical and highly suspect.) In both the newsreel footage and the contemporary interviews, Hiss himself is calm, articulate, dispassionate. He is even this way when he admits that one of the effects of his trials was to destroy his marriage. His wife was by nature, he explains, a shy, private person who simply couldn't endure the public scrutiny and ridicule. Now we understand why her name is on that list of people who wouldn't be interviewed. More than that, we understand, if only dimly, that behind the public world in which this film is set there has been a private one just as painful and poignant as that in which Philly Wohl lives.

Lowenthal's nearly three-hour film is in effect a brief for the defense. By going back and interviewing around a dozen of the principals involved in Hiss's trials, Lowenthal painstakingly builds a case showing how Hiss was framed. From the time that a young California congressman named Richard Nixon went after Hiss in the hearings until an equally zealous prosecutor, Thomas Murphy, did so during the trials, Hiss was the victim of unscrupulous, desperately ambitious men. They were men more than willing to ruin Hiss's life, waste his talents, and exploit the worst instincts and fears of the American people in order to further their own careers. "This was a sewer we were working in," HUAC's own chief investigator, Robert Stripling, tells Lowenthal, and he's clearly not referring to the people on the witness's side of the committee tables.

As we might expect, the F.B.I. is revealed to have had an especially villainous role in this conspiracy. First the agency fed restricted information incriminating to Hiss to the Rev. John Cronin so that Cronin could pass it on to Nixon for use in tripping up Hiss during his Congressional testimony. Then during Hiss's trials the F.B.I. suppressed, or allowed to be suppressed, information it had which might have cleared Hiss. One such item was a deposition in which Chambers admitted

being a homosexual. Another was research indicating that the typewriter introduced into evidence as the one on which Hiss allegedly transcribed documents for Russian intelligence had too high a serial number even to have been manufactured at the time that Hiss's wife acquired their typewriter. Jurors from both Hiss's trials admit when Lowenthal presents this newly uncovered evidence that it would have cast enough doubt to change their votes to acquittal. When Lowenthal informs Rep. Hebert of Louisiana, who was on the House committee during the Hiss-Chambers confrontation, about the deposition revealing Chambers's homosexuality, Hebert's mouth drops open. He literally can't believe it and has to be shown copies of the depositions to be convinced.

Unlike *Best Boy*, Lowenthal's film doesn't tell a story. It makes an argument. Though the argument is at times so intricate we have trouble following it, what slowly emerges is not only certain facts, but certain character traits of the principal figure himself, Alger Hiss. In some ways I feel Hiss makes a dubious impression on us. Chief investigator Stripling recalls, for instance, that when Hiss met Nixon, Hiss said, "I'm Harvard Law and you're a graduate of, uh . . . Whittier, is it?" We can just imagine how this twitting, coming from a whiz kid like Hiss, rankled Nixon. It doesn't excuse Nixon's vengefulness, but it suggests that Hiss did originally go up to Capitol Hill with a foolish pride — that he was playing with fire by showing such contempt for politicians as venal as one expects to find on this kind of committee. We can feel creeping

through the hearings the whole committee's resentment for the people George Wallace calls "briefcase-toting bureaucrats." We can also sense around the edges of Hiss's own reminiscence an arrogance which prevented him from defending himself adequately. He simply couldn't believe at first that this coalition of yahoos could destroy anyone as talented and accomplished as he was.

I guess everybody tends to impose upon the world the values he has within himself, his sense of his own worth. Thus a man like Nixon, cunning and driven but mistrustful of his own effectiveness, takes the world to be a devious place where you have to screw other people to get ahead. Thus, too, a genuinely able, confident man cannot help believing that the system is a meritocracy, that talent and honor will out in the end. In order to take the committee as seriously as he should have, Hiss would have had to admit to himself — or rather, convince himself — that the system in this country is not basically a meritocracy. Worse than that, he would have had to admit that our system does not serve to protect those rights and liberties on which his own liberalism was founded. In this way, we realize, Hiss was the victim not only of Nixon's unscrupulousness, but of his own ideals.

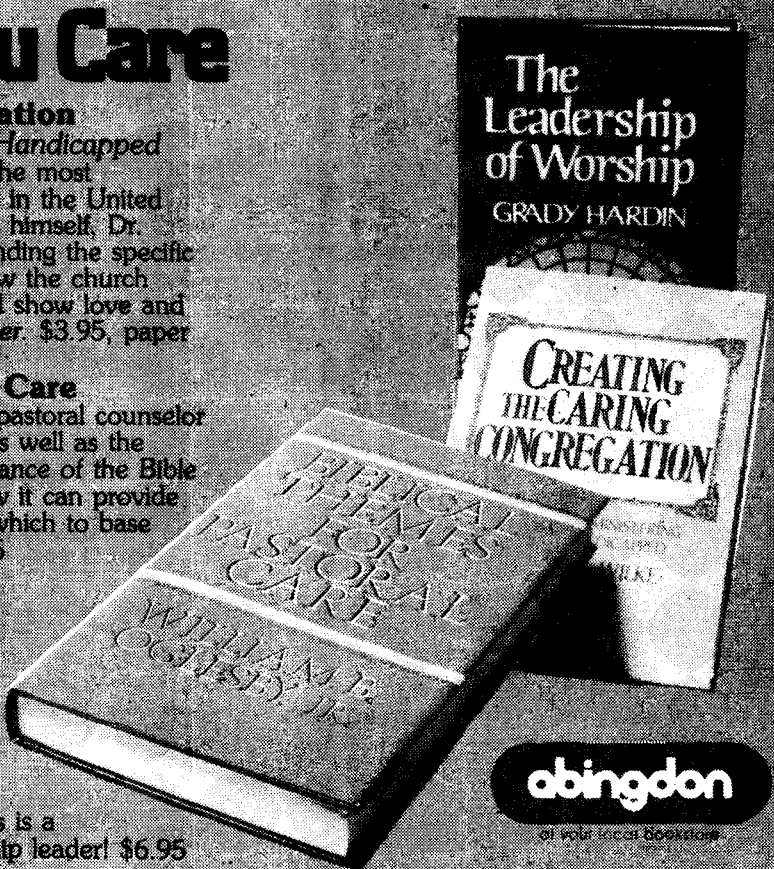
The most astounding revelation in *The Trials of Alger Hiss* — more surprising, when you think about it, than any disclosure of new evidence — is that Hiss still believes in the system. This is explicit at one point when, asked by Lowenthal whether he is bitter, Hiss says he's not and that he still feels America

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has the best judicial system in the world. Beyond such declarations, though, the unshakability of Hiss's faith is implicit in the whole tone of this movie and in the very demeanor of the man who is its subject. It is demonstrated by the bare fact that thirty years after the original injustice was done to him, this man who is now in his seventies patiently continues to persist with his appeals, and fully expects that the same system which abused him will also exonerate him in the end. This is a very powerful testimonial, one which virtually overrides all the evidence to the contrary in the film.

Despite the title Lowenthal has given his film, it is not Alger Hiss who is on trial. In the first place, as Lowenthal well knows, no one will go to this movie who isn't already convinced of Hiss's innocence. And besides, even Nixon would have a hard time today keeping a straight face while accusing

Hiss of being a Communist or perjurer or anything else. No, it's not Hiss who's on trial, but the American system. If the verdict of acquittal, or at least of a temporary stay, is surprising to us, that's because we never anticipated that anyone as effective as Hiss himself would serve as the system's staunch defender, its key character witness. Maybe *The Trials of Alger Hiss* is not so different from *Best Boy* after all. As I said in my last column, *Best Boy* is a film that gives us a lift because it documents a case in which the system—all the systems, in fact—worked. *The Trials of Alger Hiss* documents a case in which the system hasn't worked at all. Yet it manages to give us just the same kind of lift. Like Philly Wohl, Alger Hiss compels us to admit that the only thing which ever makes a system credible anyway is the humanity of the people in it, the movement of the spirit in the rock. COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

Books: GOSPEL, INFALLIBILITY, & KÜNG

THESE two works complement one another. The first, edited by two of Küng's assistants, contains (1) a chronology of Küng's life, work and times; (2) studies and reactions to Küng's major books by friendly critics and by Küng himself; (3) a revealing 55-page interview of Küng on his personal and theological evolution up to 1978; (4) a bibliography of Küng's productions. The second, by Küng himself, repeats and clarifies his views on infallibility. It was singled out by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its declaration of December 15, 1979 which stripped Küng of his canonical teaching mission in the church.

The first work furnishes the general context within which Küng theologizes; the second indicates the specific views on infallibility which emerge from this context. Read together, they furnish a lively and succinct comprehension of the controversial Küng.

To understand Küng's own view on infallibility and the view he opposes is to understand the basic presupposition that undergirds his work and the focus of his battle with church authorities.

For Küng the starting point of all theology and the criterion against which all theologizing must be judged is the *Gospel*. The *Gospel* is the basic meaning imbedded in the earthly life and preaching of Jesus and expressed in the

HANS KÜNG: HIS WORK AND HIS WAY

Hermann Häring and Karl-Josef Kuschel, editors

Doubleday, \$4.50, 254 pp.

THE CHURCH—MAINTAINED IN TRUTH

Hans Küng

Seabury, \$6.95, 78 pp.

Peter Chirico

New Testament. Küng rejects the notion that all individual verses of the New Testament are without theological error, but he asserts that shining through all these errors is the *initial* witness to the earthly Jesus expressed in the totality of the New Testament which constitutes the basic and infallible *Gospel*.

As examples of fundamental truths which go to make up the *Gospel* Küng indicates (1) that in Jesus is found God's ultimate and decisive call, his definitive truth about himself; and (2) that the church as the community of believers in Jesus Christ is indestructible.

Further, Küng affirms that this *Gospel* can be known not by biblical fundamentalists but by those who employ "an historical-critical interpretation at the highest level." These scripture experts can strip away from the New Testament text the post-resurrection layers of interpretation

and get back to the solid rock of the real Jesus as he was seen by the original witnesses. In short, for Küng the only ultimate and infallibly known criterion for all theologizing is the real Jesus of the original eyewitnesses as this Jesus is determined by modern scripture scholars using the historical-critical method.

The view opposed by Küng and which he has long traced back to Vatican I is this: the ultimate infallible criterion of Christian truth is the definitive teaching of church authorities. According to this view, these authorities have the power to call effectively upon the Holy Spirit to invest them with what Küng calls *a priori* infallibility. This means that, whenever the pope or the assembled bishops around the pope wish and decide to be infallible, the Holy Spirit automatically intervenes to preserve their subsequent doctrinal pronouncement from error.

Küng strongly objects to this view of *a priori* infallibility. He thinks that its acceptance by the church has increasingly fostered the notion that *any* teaching by ecclesiastical authorities, including obviously non-infallible teaching, must be believed because it emanates from persons endowed with a special charism of truth. Not their reasoning but their charism guarantees that everything hierarchical authorities say is trustworthy. Hence, whenever the

pope speaks and whenever a Roman Congregation issues a decree, the only Christian response is automatic acceptance. This for Küng is tyranny and absolutism. And it all stems, according to him, from a dynamic given accelerated impetus by the Vatican I definition of the *a priori* infallibility of the pope.

What can be said of this confrontation of views? On the one hand, Küng's absolute and infallible criterion, the *Gospel*, can be challenged. First, it takes for granted that Jesus's life and preaching is normative for all times and places. However, we now know that the earthly Jesus, precisely because he was truly human, was culturally conditioned. Hence, in the way he lived and taught, inevitably there were aspects which pertained only to his specific place and time and not to all times and places. However, since Christ lived before the age when it was realized that human beings were culturally conditioned, he did not distinguish between what pertained only to his time and place and what pertained to all times and places.

Accordingly, one cannot set up the earthly Jesus as the norm for all times unless one makes important qualifications which derive not from Jesus himself but from distinctions about cultural conditioning made by those who lived after New Testament times. All this calls into question the unqualified way in which Küng makes the earthly Jesus, of himself, "the absolute standard" of Christian truth for all time.

Secondly, Küng's *Gospel* criterion implies great trust in the reliability of the eyewitnesses to Jesus's ministry. However, careful scripture study has made evident that the eyewitnesses were plodding, doubting, obtuse, and erring individuals whose views about Jesus had to be corrected after the resurrection. Certainly St. Paul, who was not one of the eyewitnesses, had a better grasp of the Christian message than did the companions of the earthly Jesus. Thus, Küng's method, which places total reliance on the global understanding of the original witnesses in preference to a method which gives weight also to the

understanding of the post-resurrection church, is at least questionable.

Thirdly, Küng's *Gospel* criterion puts too much trust in the freedom from bias of scripture experts using the modern historical-critical method. These scholars do employ better methods and they are better trained than their predecessors. However, studies in cognitional theory have revealed that no amount of technical training can overcome all hidden biases and presuppositions. These biases and presuppositions can lead even competent exegetes to overlook certain aspects of a text and to under- or overestimate other aspects. Küng does not give enough attention to these biases, especially the kinds that affect a whole epoch.

In short, Küng's infallible criterion of the *Gospel* has questionable elements in its three crucial constituents—the normativity of the earthly Jesus, the reliability of the original witnesses, and the lack of bias of modern exegetes.

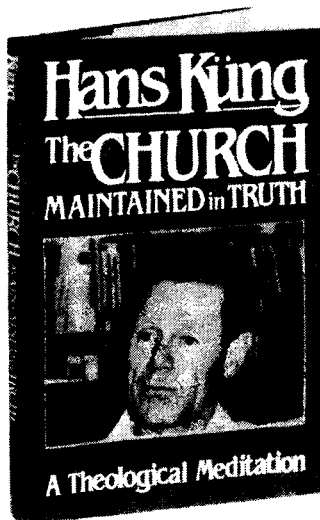
On the other hand, Küng's attack on *a priori* infallibility has merit. If church officials could claim to possess infallibility whenever they wish, then surely the Christian people would be vulnerable to tyranny. However, this *a priori* infallibility was not taught by Vatican I. The council denied that the pope had to have the explicit consent of the church as a condition for exercising infallibility. It also asserted a number of positive criteria. Thus, the pope has to be acting as head of the whole church; he has to use his supreme apostolic authority; he has to be defining a doctrine of faith or morals. However, it is one thing to assert that there are criteria for the pope's exercise of infallibility; it is quite another thing to assert that the criteria have been fulfilled in a given case. All Vatican I did was to set up criteria. It never explicitly took up and defined *who* judges when the criteria have been fulfilled.

Undoubtedly the vast majority of the Fathers at Vatican I assumed that the pope himself is the one who decides this question. Certainly the textbook writers after Vatican I made this assumption. However, this assumption was not explicitly taught as church doctrine in the

Hans Küng THE CHURCH MAINTAINED IN TRUTH A Theological Meditation

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Richard E. McBrien is one of the leading authorities on Catholicism in the United States. He is a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. He has received the Sigmund Freud Award for distinguished achievement in the field. He is Professor of Theology and Director of the Institute of Religion, Philosophy and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College. He has also served as a member of the National Council for Catholic-Baptist Dialogue.

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council's documents. Thus, it cannot be claimed to be the defined teaching of the church. As canon law puts it, only that teaching can be accepted as infallible which is manifestly so. Hence, it is not true to say that according to Vatican I the pope is infallible whenever he says he is infallible or whenever he says he has fulfilled the criteria set forth by Vatican I. It is still possible to claim that the only certain evidence we can have that the pope has fulfilled the criteria is that his teaching actually resonates with the faith that lives in the whole church. This follows from the fact that, according to Vatican I, infallibility primarily rests in the whole church and it is this ecclesial infallibility which the pope expresses in any irreformable doctrinal decision.

A Roman Congregation has deprived

Küng of his canonical teaching mission in the church largely because of his views on infallibility. Unfortunately, the Congregation has not addressed itself to Küng's basic affirmation of the criterion of the *Gospel* or to his basic denial of *a priori* infallibility. Nor were these two points addressed in the earlier declarations of the Congregation in 1973 and 1975 on the same issue of infallibility. Unless the Congregation deals explicitly with these two issues, it will (1) give the impression that it has not grasped the import of Küng's criterion of the *Gospel*, (2) confuse the Christian people into thinking that Küng's *a priori* infallibility is actually the defined teaching of Vatican I, and (3) miss an opportunity to move toward reconciling Küng with church authorities.

health needs can provide the necessary stimulus for a flagging economy. It could be financed through progressive tax reform. And price controls could prevent corporate attempts to reap undeserved favors from the new demand.

As Harrington notes, the question is not whether such a program is inflationary, but whether corporations will countenance public sector competition and a redistributive tax policy. The real question is political, not economic.

Harrington views the 1980s as a transitional decade, much like the 1890s or 1930s. Just as these decades sloughed off past eras of capitalism, the 1980s will cast off the basic structures of New Deal welfare capitalism. Harrington sees his revived liberalism as one outcome of the 1980s, but he also sees another possibility: a new reactionary agenda based on a regressive incomes policy and reduced social spending. These policies would be designed to enhance corporate profits and divide the employed from the unemployed, the white middle class from the minority underclass. They were first contemplated by Richard Nixon and John Connally in the early '70s and could become the program of a 1980s Republican or even Democratic administration.

Harrington argues that the possibility of a revived liberalism lies in the unification of the working class and the middle class. The non-professional middle class, Harrington points out, is increasingly divided from its working class cousins by little more than status illusions. The continued economic crisis of the 1980s might, Harrington hopes, make this clear to both groups.

Decade of Decision is a long, well-constructed political argument. It is the best current antidote to the most common liberal and conservative misapprehensions about welfare, the poor, the extent of unemployment in the U.S., and the plight of the cities. Its principal weaknesses stem from incompleteness and from its argumentative structure, which occasionally prevents any clear statement of the author's assumptions.

There are two major omissions in *Decade of Decision*. There is no discussion of foreign and military policy. In so far as the further escalation of the arms race

New agenda for liberalism

DECADE OF DECISION

Michael Harrington

Simon and Schuster, \$11.95, 354 pp.

John Judis

BY the mid-70s, it was already apparent that the U.S. had entered a new historical period. Simultaneous inflation and unemployment, along with a declining dollar, defied policy-makers. The American defeat in Vietnam cast doubt upon U.S. imperial objectives.

The Watergate scandal initially obscured the profound policy crisis that had arisen. In 1976, politicians ran on their sincerity and truthfulness rather than their record or proposals. But in 1980, the debate has begun to surface. Some of the alternatives presented—wage-price-profit controls, gasoline rationing, a federal energy corporation—suggest new directions; others—reduction in social spending, return to the gold standard, regressive tax breaks—hearken back to pre-New Deal days.

In *Decade of Decision*, Michael Harrington goes well beyond the current diagnoses of and remedies for America's ills. Harrington, author of nine books, including *The Other America* and *The Vast Majority*, and chair of the Democra-

tic Socialist Organizing Committee, attributes stagflation—simultaneous inflation and unemployment—to a structural crisis in world capitalism; and he argues that only a revived liberalism that goes beyond New Deal reforms can achieve social justice and pull America out of its doldrums.

Harrington takes issue with the Ronald Reagans and the Jimmy Carter-style Democrats, who blame stagflation on federal deficits and excessive regulation, ignoring either the business cycle or the price-behavior of corporations. Harrington argues persuasively that both soaring deficits and declining productivity were caused by rather than causes of the original stagflation. Harrington also argues convincingly that the vaunted Republican solutions to stagflation—regressive tax reductions *à la* Kemp-Roth—have not led and will not lead toward productive investment, but toward speculation in violins, gold, and real estate.

Harrington doesn't repeat, however, the usual liberal error of then defending on purely humanitarian grounds a full-employment budget, while ignoring corporate rejoinders about skyrocketing inflation. Harrington contends that social spending for housing, mass transit, and

will doom any revived liberalism, it would have seemed necessary to take up America's military balance with the Soviet Union.

Harrington also omits any discussion of the political institutions that might effect a transition to a new liberalism. Such a transition would obviously require some spontaneous awareness by the working and middle classes that they shared a common oppression, but it would also require some leadership and unity among the major popular organizations—unions, public interest groups, minority, and women's rights—around a political objective.

There are two places in *Decade of Decision* where its argumentative form seems to detract from clearer understanding. Harrington's explanation of why stagflation occurs must be pieced together out of his arguments against purported remedies for it. At one point, he tentatively endorses Kondratiev's theory of the long wave; at another point, he relies on a more historical view according to which the current crisis is the result of industrial overcapacity in such key world capitalist industries as steel, petrochemicals, and textiles. He never fully explains this latter view, but it would seem to hold that the reconstruction of Europe and Japan and the introduction of new industrial capacity in the Third World was not met by an equivalent increase in worldwide effective demand. As a result, the major capitalist powers find themselves roughly in the same situation that preceded World War I and the Great Depression.

Harrington also lets his opposition to the "Jerry Brown-Arthur Burns" theory of government-induced inflation obscure the issue of deficit financing. The principal precondition for the current inflation has not been deficit financing, as Harrington notes, but administered corporate prices. Faced with unfavorable markets, corporations have responded by raising their prices rather than lowering them. This creates simultaneous inflation and unemployment.

But deficit spending has played a minor role in fueling inflation—by introducing surplus capital into a private sector unwilling to use it for productive in-

vestment. And deficits have the obnoxious effect of putting taxpayers in debt to banks and corporations which should properly have made these deficits unnecessary.

These are minor flaws, however, which hardly detract from the usefulness

of Harrington's book. In a year of conservative Democrats, trumpeting the virtues of austerity, and pseudo-populist Republicans, claiming to bring prosperity to all by enriching the wealthy, *Decade of Decision* is a valuable appeal to reason and justice.

An angry & puzzled decade

THE DREAM OF THE GOLDEN MOUNTAINS

Remembering the 1930s

Malcolm Cowley

Viking Press, \$14.95, 310 pp.

Daniel T. Rodgers

"**W**HAT in God's name has happened to you?" Edmund Wilson exploded in 1938 at the slow-spoken poet who had succeeded him at the literary desk of *The New Republic*. Your "damned old stalinist line . . . gets more and more cockeyed by the minute." Wilson himself, then barely a half dozen years removed from his urgent call for

writers ready to throw in their lot with a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat, was hardly an innocent in whatever was "cockeyed" about the literary politics of the 1930s. In that decade of writers' congresses and the proletarian novel, when the barricades swarmed with men of letters, when old rebels like Sherwood Anderson were fired with enthusiasm for the Communist Party and even F. Scott Fitzgerald was making his troubled way through Marx, whatever it was that happened to Malcolm Cowley carries much more than simply biographical interest.

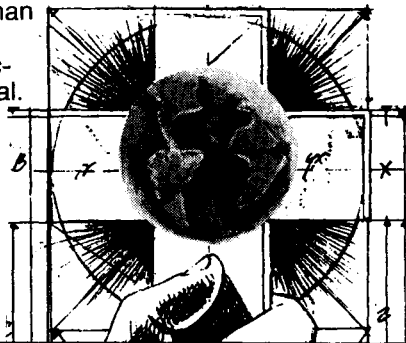
The Dream of the Golden Mountains is part memoir, part chronicle of the years

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of the early 1930s out of which those political passions erupted. The Cowley who began the decade, as he described himself in his much earlier and brilliant memoir of the twenties, *Exile's Return*, was a literary rebel but a political indifferent. He had left Harvard, convinced that nothing his elders had taught him there was true, to join the flight of young writers to Greenwich Village and Paris, flirted with Dada, published a volume of poetry, and drank deeply of the creed to art for art's sake.

He was finally wrenched out of that exclusive passion for form early in 1932 when he joined a writers' fact-finding mission to the seething, strike-bound Kentucky coal fields and found himself routed out of his hotel bed and run out of town, to watch as Waldo Frank was bludgeoned by coal operators' goons. The experience pushed Cowley into a whirl of angry speeches and manifestoes, revolutionary dreams, and Communist alliances. Like most writers drawn to Communism in the 1930s, Cowley traveled with, not in, the party. But few

fellow travelers were more ardent or eloquent, more stubborn in their commitment, or, in his post in the back pages of *The New Republic*, more prominently placed than he.

Why had they all dreamed so fervently of those golden mountains, of that classless soviet future shimmering in the distance beyond the bleached bones of capitalism? That question is at the center of Cowley's memoir, and to a great extent, it must be said, he himself is not quite sure of the answer. *Exile's Return*, when it appeared in 1934, was an autobiography written virtually in the present tense, a dazzling collision of the still vividly remembered, and repudiated, aesthetic creed of the 1920s with the political passions set loose by the Depression. In the present volume Cowley looks across a much greater expanse of time, and the thirties critic is, even to himself, a much more distant figure, moving indistinctly through fragmentary memories of rented halls, speakers' tables, folding chairs, and political wranglings.

Not that Cowley has lost any of his consummate literary craftsmanship. *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* is full of vividly realized descriptions of the decade. Many of the familiar stories are here: the rout of the Bonus Marchers, the brief and flamboyant Blue Eagle campaign, the skirmishes over proletarian literature; and they are joined by as many that are new. But the man at the center of it all, who marched in May Day parades and dreamed revolutionary visions, is a much less vivid presence than the events that boomed and crashed around him.

Cowley is too serious about the question of political commitment, however, not to offer explanations, all of them now worn by use to something of the brightness of historical clichés. There was the example of Russia. There was the classic generational revolt of young writers against the world their fathers had made. Above all, there was the phenomenon of conversion, the exhilarating plunge that Communism offered into faith and comradesly communion.

Certainly there was Russia, untouched by the global economic collapse of the thirties—the “moral top of the world,”

as Edmund Wilson described it in 1936, “where the light never really goes out.” Cowley himself never saw it closer at hand than Soviet propaganda films but he felt its presence vividly and his convictions may have lasted the longer as a result.

There was, too, a sense of relief, and at times of secret triumph, in watching the world that one's fathers and teachers had built with such self-importance crumble so swiftly to the ground. But Cowley was no stripling writer in 1929. He was a good deal older than the apprentice authors like Richard Wright, huddled around the coffee urns in the John Reed Clubs. Cowley's generation was that of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, all of whom, for all their doubts and waverings, rode through the 1930s essentially on the ideas they had hammered in place before the crash.

Was it then a matter of conversion? That Communism served those who fell into its embrace as a surrogate church—militant, emotional, and apocalyptic—is the most brightly polished of all the explanations of its appeal. The argument was born with the first recantations and codified in the collected confessions of 1949, *The God That Failed*. It was no accident that the analogy helped to domesticate and deflate participation in Communism. It made a temporary allegiance to the party about as foolish, understandable, and thoroughly American as a fit in a Methodist camp meeting.

Certainly some of those drawn to Communism in the 1930s were pulled by the guilt and emotional hunger that form the classic preconditions of the conversion experience, and felt something akin to its emotional catharsis. Cowley himself was no stranger to the “desperate feeling of solitude,” the sense of entrapment in an inner monologue, that he ascribed to the writers he knew best in the 1920s. But if in the thirties he sang “The Internationale,” at times with head thrown back and tears in his eyes, Cowley never felt the urgent need to leave his own self and class behind, not by “pieces or parts,” as the younger writer Meridel Le Sueur described it, but by a willingness “to go all the way, with full belief,

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THE
DREAM OF
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REMEMBERING THE 1930s
MALCOLM COWLEY

Malcolm Cowley's chronological sequel to *Exile's Return* is a **"superb re-creation of the turmoil and politics of the ... early 1930's."**

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into that darkness" of rebirth and belonging.

That was the authentic voice of conversion, and by those standards Cowley was hardly a convert at all. Nor were most of the prominent writers drawn into the Communist orbit. Edmund Wilson dreamed of "taking Communism away from the Communists"; John Dos Passos talked of finding an ad man to put Marx across in genuinely American language; and Cowley, too, was an outsider almost by reflex. He could not resist chiding Granville Hicks, a far more orthodox Marxian critic than he in the thirties, for behaving like a football coach at a pep rally, hoarsely insisting that "we simply can't lose." Cowley's *New Republic* columns in the early thirties were, in contrast, full of premonitions of short-run disaster, and he quietly passed on the proletarian novels to someone fuller of the faith than he to review.

What mattered to the Cowleys and the Wilsons far more than catharsis was comprehension. If to liken Communism to a kind of primitive church catches a part of its appeal, it badly understates how strongly the party appealed to the intellect and, still more, how desperately much there was to explain in the bewildering events of the 1930s. Communism offered, as no rival political movement did, a "long view" of history, in which the death rattles of capitalism and accelerating international crises fell into a sweeping historical pattern; and when one came upon it, Cowley remembers, its explanatory effect was "overwhelming."

The "long view" was too European-

REVIEWERS

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ROBERT LEITER has contributed to *The Nation*, *Commentary*, and *Film Heritage*, among other journals.

centered to hold much place for the New Deal or offer much hope that anything would come of its frenetic motions. Edmund Wilson, sent to report Franklin Roosevelt's installation into the presidency, could not dispel from the front of his mind the zanily dressed lodge members, in purple fezzes and golden cloaks, who made up the tag end of the inaugural parade. The long view heightened the gaudy, sideshow aspects of the New Deal, particularly when measured against the real drama, somber and foreboding, being played out in Germany, Spain, and Russia.

Ultimately the long view foundered on those same distant events. Whether the disillusionment came with the Moscow trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, or the dismemberment of Poland, the Russian dream sooner or later turned to ashes, the long view failed, and the result was a feeling of emptiness and a raft of quiet resignations. Cowley held on through the end of the decade, much longer than most. He is silent here about those last bitter years of broken friendships and angry recriminations at the end of the

thirties. *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* concludes in 1936, in what Cowley calls "High Thirties," the euphoric time of the Popular Front, when "the price of groceries, a small merchant bankrupt in the next block, a love affair broken off, . . . [the] revolts in Spain, a new factory in the Urals, [and] an obscure battle in the interior of China" seemed to hold together in a single historical pattern.

Cowley's reticence here and elsewhere will disappoint, but it is fitting. What he has given us are the shattered pieces of experience that drove him toward the long view and that in the angry and puzzled thirties had, somehow, to be comprehended: the grim, midnight ride across the Kentucky state line; Washington, D.C., bristling with sabers and machine guns, and haggard Army veterans talking of revolution; the panacea salesman clustered at *The New Republic's* door; F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hart Crane edging toward self-destruction. These are superbly told stories. They are not an inner view of political commitment, but, in the end, they are the heart of the matter.

Simple terms, burning words

SO LONG, SEE YOU TOMORROW

William Maxwell

Knopf, \$7.95, 135 pp

Robert A. Leiter

THE CENTRAL EVENT in William Maxwell's new work is a violent murder. We are given the particulars in the opening pages. The style is unadorned, reportorial.

Early one morning while milking his cow, Lloyd Wilson is shot. He is found sitting on a stool, his eyes open. The bullet had entered his body just above the heart. More horrifying still, "the murderer had cut off the dead man's ear with a razor and carried it away with him."

If Mr. Maxwell's story were about nothing more than the murder, his presentation of this information so early on might have proved ruinous. But though he writes well and powerfully of the crime, he does not want it to dominate his other

concerns. By suppressing an unnecessary element of suspense, he can explore the nature of death, the confusions of childhood, the quality—the very texture—of desire.

The story is told by a narrator looking back on events that occurred fifty years earlier. Once the details of the crime are presented, the narrator tells us about his childhood, of his mother's death in the influenza epidemic of 1918. For those who have read Mr. Maxwell's earlier works, this is familiar material. This is the small town Middle West of *They Came Like Swallows*, the world which haunted the urban setting of *The Folded Leaf* and dominated Mr. Maxwell's near perfect memoir *Ancestors*.

At first this shift in the narrative is a bit disconcerting. It seems the author has needlessly delayed the telling of his story. But Mr. Maxwell has his reasons.

The narrator, now without a mother, is a lonely child, and a woman in the com-

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Trinity College, Burlington, Vermont 05401, June 22-27. John McKenzie, Pheme Perkins, Reginald Fuller, Daniel Daley. Write: Director.

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For people who are looking for a simple, catholic, lifestyle. If interested, write: Michael Rinaldini, 16 Henrietta St., apt. 3, Asheville, N.C. 28801.

Translation

Translating English to Chinese. Write: P.O. Box 25123, Chicago, Ill. 60625.

Summer Institutes

The University of Notre Dame has arranged for a number of institutes from June 23 - August 9. Write the Center for Pastoral and Social Ministry, Notre Dame, Indiana, 46556, for this summer's schedule.

munity sends her son, Cletus, to play with him. The narrator is overjoyed to have a friend at last, though Cletus is much less enthusiastic, feeling that he was wrongly pressed into duty. But a certain sense of camaraderie grows between them until the night when they say—as has been their innocent custom throughout their brief friendship—“So long, see you tomorrow.” It is Cletus's father who kills Lloyd Wilson. Wilson had been having an affair with Cletus's mother for many months.

The boys do not see one another again. Fifteen days after Lloyd Wilson's murder, Cletus's father is found dead at the bottom of Deer Creek gravel pit, an apparent suicide from a bullet wound to the head. Cletus's family moves away from

town. Years pass. The narrator's father remarries, gets a promotion and moves his family to Chicago. It is here that Cletus reappears.

One day during the first week or so of school as I was hurrying along a corridor that was lined with metal lockers I saw Cletus Smith coming toward me. It was as if he had risen from the dead. He didn't speak. I didn't speak. We just kept on walking until we had passed each other. And after that there was no way that I could not have done it.

It is here in a bold imaginative leap that the narrator takes himself out of his story and moves back in time to a point before the murder. He wants to know what it is like to be a child whose father will come to murder a man. Then he wants to know more—what it is like to be that very man, that man's wife, the lover himself. The narrator offers these pages in retribution for the sin of not speaking in that school corridor and it is one of the great gestures of kindness in all literature.

The technique is reminiscent of Proust. The narrator, like Marcel imagining Swann pursuing Odette, writes of events he cannot possibly have witnessed. And this offering, like the story of Swann, is a long meditation on desire.

Mr. Maxwell's people speak and think in simple terms but the words burn. “The memory of making love lay like a bandage across the front of his mind, day and night.” The gestures and the words build until we approach the moment when the murder will be committed. Will Mr. Maxwell “do it”? we ask. When he does not, there is no sense of loss. In its place he gives us a much more telling moment. Cletus, staying at his Aunt Jenny's house, fears that his father will return, while fearing as well that he will not. He tries to rest.

Aunt Jenny has pulled the shades to the sill. That way, people won't peer in and see what she sees whenever she closes her eyes, and sometimes when they are wide open. The double bed in the front room is made up and Cletus is lying on it, with his shoes extending over the side so they won't dirty the spread. He is lying on his left side,

in the fetal position, as if he is trying to get out of this world by the way he came into it.

It is the sight of those shoes that is so moving.

The narrator returns at the end of the story. He stills feels guilty whenever he thinks of Cletus.

But it isn't only my failure that I think about. I also wonder about him, about what happened to him. Whether he was spared the sight of his father's drowned body. Whether after a while he and his mother were able to look at each other without embarrassment. Whether he had as lonely a time as I did when he first moved to Chicago. And whether the series of events that started with the murder of Lloyd Wilson—whether all that finally began to seem less real, more like something he dreamed, so that instead of being stuck there he could go on and by the grace of God lead his own life, undestroyed by what was not his doing.”

Mr. Maxwell's greatest concern has always been with how people manage to survive.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 258)

never behind the Iron Curtain. . . .” In commenting on this statement, I reported that I was a member of the U.S. delegation which returned the crown to Hungary and noted for the record that I took on that assignment with the full approval of church authorities in Hungary and at the Vatican. Mr. Purcell blandly replies that this in no way disproves Hitchcock's gratuitous accusation against Fr. Hehir. Is he seriously suggesting, then, that Fr. Hehir must be charged with following a double standard because he favored the return of the crown but that the highest church authorities in Hungary and at the Vatican, who also favored its return, are not to be charged with the same offense? If so, the logic of his argument completely escapes me. Courage, Mr. Purcell! If you really think that church authorities in Hungary and at the Vatican

were wrong in supporting the return of the crown, why not say so?

I seriously doubt, in this connection, that either Professor Hitchcock or Mr. Purcell would be so mean-spirited in their criticism of a Fr. Bryan Hehir if they knew the man they were talking about. It goes without saying that Professor Hitchcock is perfectly free to criticize that segment of the church bureaucracy known as the United States Catholic Conference (even though, to the best of my knowledge, he has never really studied the organization), but all is not fair in love and war. That is to say, whatever he may think about the U.S.C.C., it was utterly reprehensible on his part to smear the reputation of a Bryan Hehir—one of the most competent, most dedicated, and profoundly religious American Catholics, clerical or lay, whom I have ever been privileged to meet. Let me also point out that if Hitchcock and Purcell really think that they can divide and conquer by trying to play off Bryan Hehir against his religious superiors, they are badly mistaken. At the risk of embarrassing Fr. Hehir, who is the most modest of men, I would say that, from the point of view of the American bishops and church authorities at the Vatican, he is one of the most highly respected priests in the United States.

Mr. Purcell wants to have it both ways—wants to have his cake and eat it—when it comes to providing “proof” or “evidence” of Hitchcock’s innumerable accusations against the “bureaucracy” and the members of its staff. On the one hand, he says that there is “valid evidence” for these accusations and also, presumably, for Hitchcock’s almost compulsive tendency to interpret other people’s conscious and subconscious motives. On the other hand, he says that “Monsignor Higgins surely underestimates the difficulty of getting ‘proof’ about motives when one is in the establishment and has buddies to cover for him.” He doesn’t say who is covering for whom or on what issues. He provides no evidence, no proof, but simply, without blinking an eye, makes the flat statement quoted above and asks us to accept it as an article of faith. He will have to excuse me if, on the basis of thirty-six

years experience at U.S.C.C., I simply refuse to do so.

Mr. Purcell says that my review of Hitchcock’s book “makes the assumption one can’t attack contemporary Catholic liberal misbehavior unless one also spends fifty percent of his words on Catholic conservative misbehavior.” In all charity, I can only say that that’s sheer nonsense. One doesn’t have to be a mathematician to understand the differ-

ence between ninety-nine percent to one and fifty-fifty. Mr. Purcell says, again without blinking an eye, that it’s a fact that “in the seventies the Left is formally, verbally schismatic. . . .” If he thinks that, in making this preposterous statement, he is accurately reflecting Mr. Hitchcock’s personal view of the matter, I can only say that with friends and apologists like himself, Hitchcock doesn’t need any enemies or critics.

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—Youth In Groups: Developing Leadership, William Forbes
—Effective Use of Weekend Formats In Youth Ministry, Martin Moran
—Social Justice Orientation For Youth Ministry, Jim & Kathy McGinnis
—The Ministry Of The Regional Or Diocesan Coordinator Of Youth Ministries, Michael Warren
—Youth And Social Justice, Rev. Paul Surlis
Place: —Cathedral College of the Immaculate Conception, Douglaston, N.Y.
Cost: —\$100 per person non-credit

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND LOVE — July 7-11, 1980

- Topics & Lecturers: —Love In The Ethics of Karl Rahner, Rev. James F. Bresnahan, S.J.
—Love & Rules In Protestant Ethics, Dr. Frederick Connerly
—Have The Rules For Making Rules Changed In Catholic Ethics? Rev. John P. Connerly, S.J.
—Love, Sin And Compromise In Christian Ethics, Rev. Charles E. Curran
—Existentialism And Christian Ethics, Rev. Thomas Fay, O.S.B.
—Christian Ethics In Church Context, Rev. Richard A. McCormick, S.J.
—Love In Bernard Lonergan's Ethics, Rev. Paul E. McKeever
—Christian Love In Protestant And Catholic Ethics — Line Of Division, Dr. Gene Outka
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—Political Theology In America, Rev. Matthew Lamb
—Discipleship And Poverty: The Vincentian Experience, Rev. Thomas Hoar, C.M.
—Critical Foundations Of Political Theory From Theory To Praxis, Praxis To Theory, Dr. J. B. Metz
—Christian Spirituality And The Mission Of The Church, Dr. Francis Schüssler-Florenza
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—The Powers Of The Weak, Ms. Elizabeth Janeway
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—Woman And Body: Beyond Dualism, Dr. Judith Plaskow
—Christian Witness: Personal And Public, Rev. Paul Surlis
—Celebration: For Liberation Or Oppression, Rev. John McKenna, C.M.
—Values and Society, Dr. Gregory Baum
—Urban Chicanos: The Triple Burden Of Race, Sex And Class, Dr. Rosamery Ruether
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Whatever of that, I should think that Mr. Purcell would be ashamed of himself for suggesting in all seriousness that he and/or Hitchcock are entitled to judge other people's conscious or subconscious motives without any evidence to go on. Pope John Paul, for one, doesn't seem to agree with this bizarre approach to intramural controversy. "What can one say," he recently asked, "of the practice of combatting or silencing those who do not share the same views by labeling them as enemies, attributing to them hostile intentions and using skillful and constant propaganda to brand them as aggressive?" Amen.

Mr. Purcell says that I have implied that "Philip Rieff is only a marginal intellectual source" and that I have explicitly argued that "Rieff's ideas about U.S. intellectuals are not made relevant to what Hitchcock has to say about the public behavior of many Catholic clerics." I would thank Mr. Purcell not to put words in my mouth. In other words, I never said anything of the kind about Rieff. To the contrary, I said that while an attempt to apply Rieff's basic thesis to the current crisis in the church might conceivably serve a useful purpose, I thought that Hitchcock's attempt in this regard was so consistently superficial and so lacking in objectivity as to be almost ludicrous. I am fully prepared to stand by that statement. I might add that if Mr. Purcell is wondering why I mentioned Rieff in the first place, he will find the answer in Hitchcock's book. That is to say, he will find that Hitchcock quotes Rieff more frequently than any other single author.

Purcell says that I have implied that "Hitchcock himself has inadequate inside knowledge of U.S. Catholicism" and asks whether or not I really believe this. The answer is obvious. I do not believe it and I never said it. What I said is that Hitchcock's knowledge about many of the individuals and organizations he so severely criticizes is based on second-, third-, and fourth-hand information and that he seldom, if ever, seems to have interviewed or even talked to the people he attacks. Again, I am fully prepared to stand by this statement.

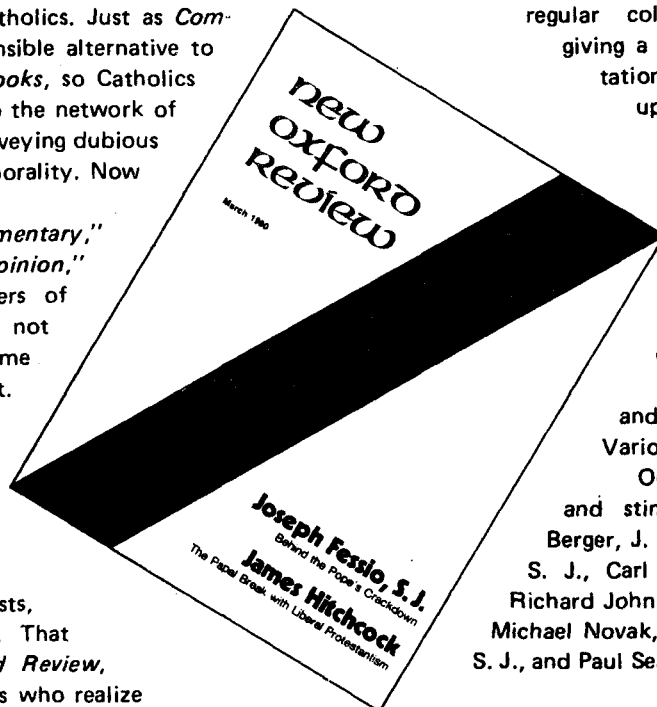
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